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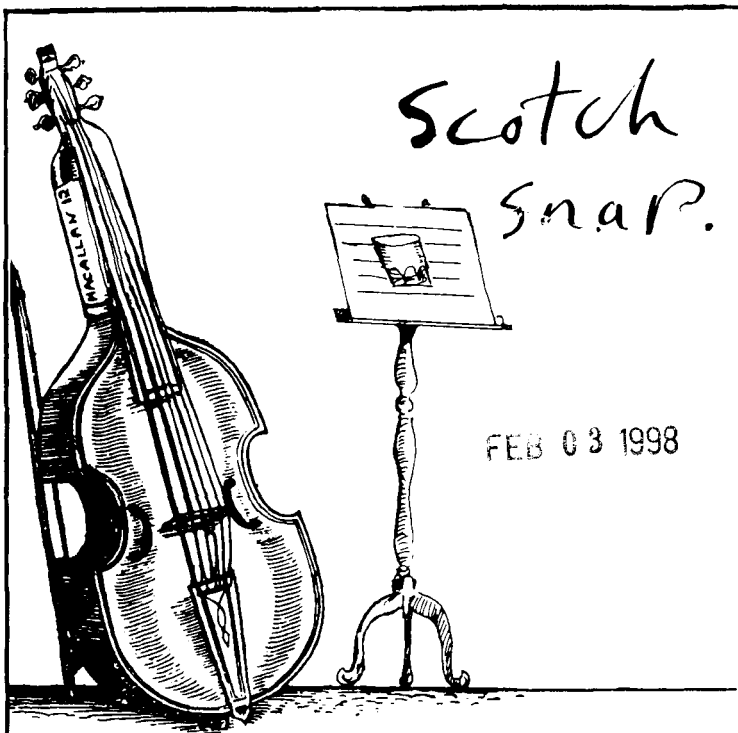

Scotch Snap.

FEB 03 1998

A manuscript from a Conservatoire of Music

Sirs, it may have come to your notice that in music we have a term '*Scotch Snap*'. This usually takes the form of a semiquaver followed by a dotted quaver, a device favoured particularly by baroque composers such as Handel giving a distinctive 'jerky' character to a dance tune.

It has been suggested in the Professors' Common Room that this figure derived its name from the rough liquors of the time which imparted *a sudden jolt to the Scottish tastebuds.*

Today, of course, we have The Macallan Single Highland Malt Whisky, which provides such a delectable legato that the *Scotch* snap has become quite forgotten – except of course in those bars where only baser spirits are jiggered out (in which case, may we suggest a *bar's rest?*).

Yours etc., Ian Curror,

FRCO (CHM), GRSM, ARCM, LRAM *and BAR.*

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Announcing the First Annual

Carson McCullers Prize for the Short Story

A Competition Sponsored by STORY Magazine

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Carson McCullers was a nineteen-year-old student at Columbia University when her first published work appeared in STORY magazine in 1936. "Wunderkind," the tale of a fifteen-year-old pianist struggling to live up to her reputation as a prodigy, established McCullers as one of STORY's most notable discoveries. Her first novel, *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, appeared in 1940 when she was twenty-two, followed by *Reflections in a Golden Eye* (1941), *The Member of the Wedding* (1946), and *The Ballad of the Sad Cafe* (1951), among others.

Continuing its rich history of literary discovery, STORY announces **The Carson McCullers Prize for the Short Story** in honor of this distinguished writer.

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3. All entries must be original, unpublished, and not submitted elsewhere until the winners are announced. STORY reserves the right to publish winning entries at its normal rate of payment—$1,000.
4. All entries must be typewritten and double-spaced on one side of 8-1/2 x 11 paper. Since manuscripts will not be returned, please do not enclose SASE requesting its return. Keep the original copy of your manuscript(s), and submit a good-quality photocopy.
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PRW8

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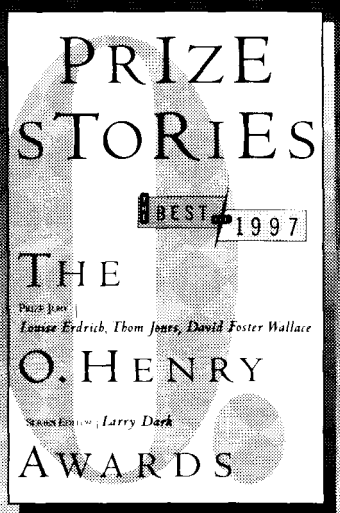

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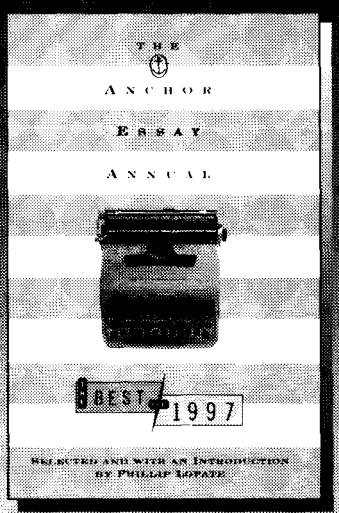

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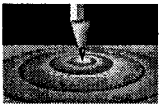

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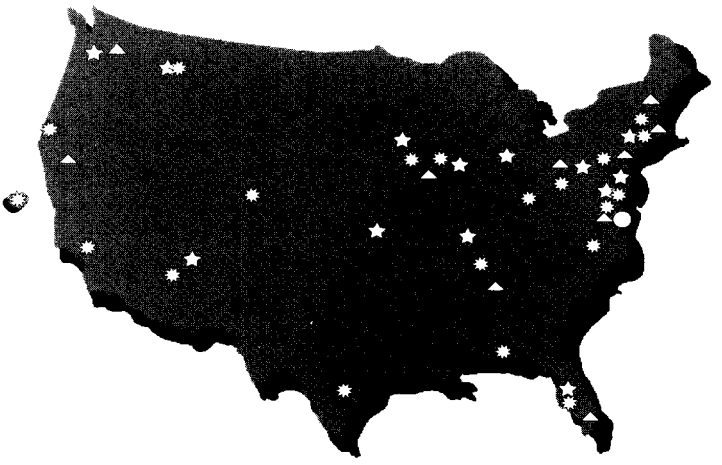

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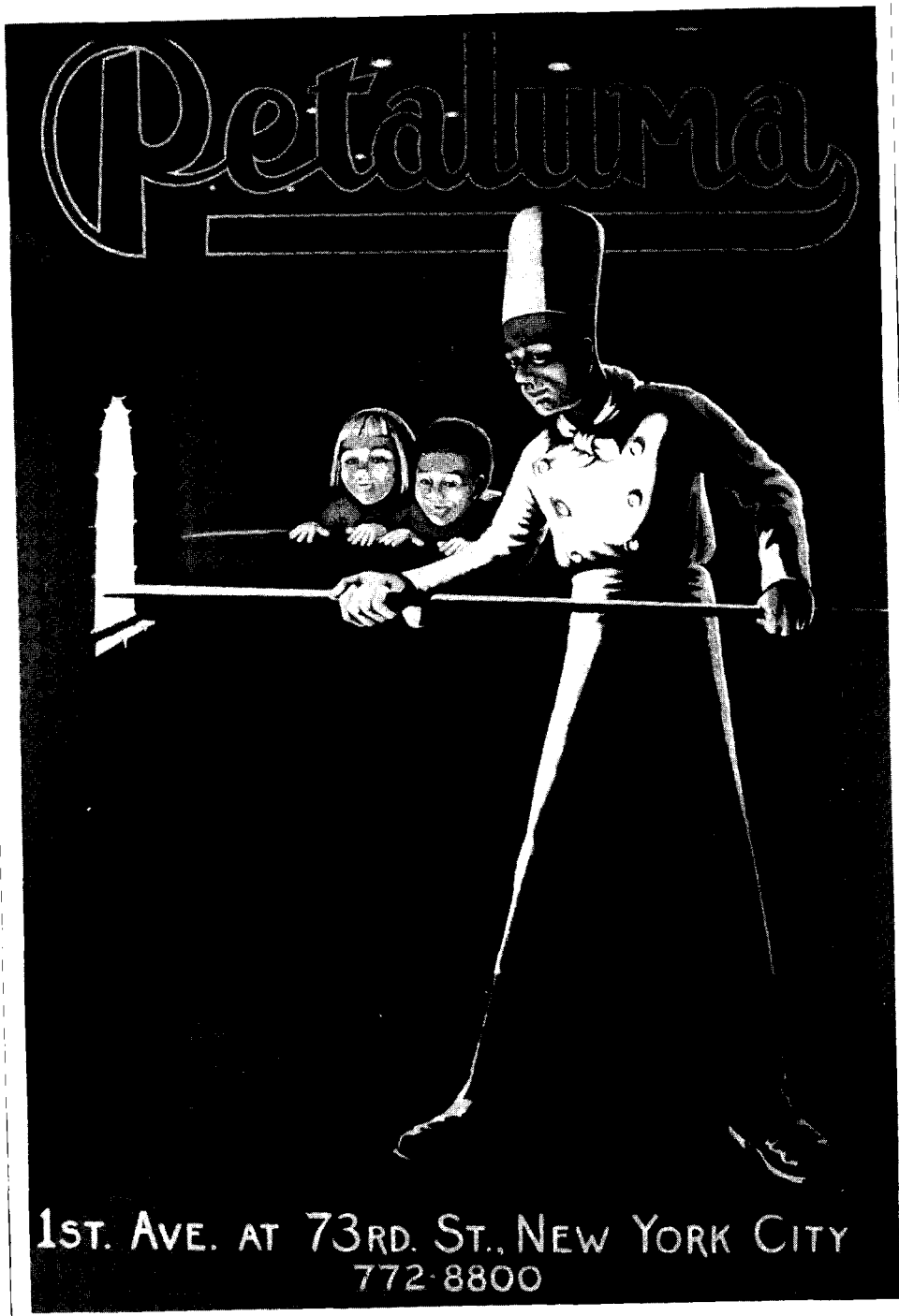

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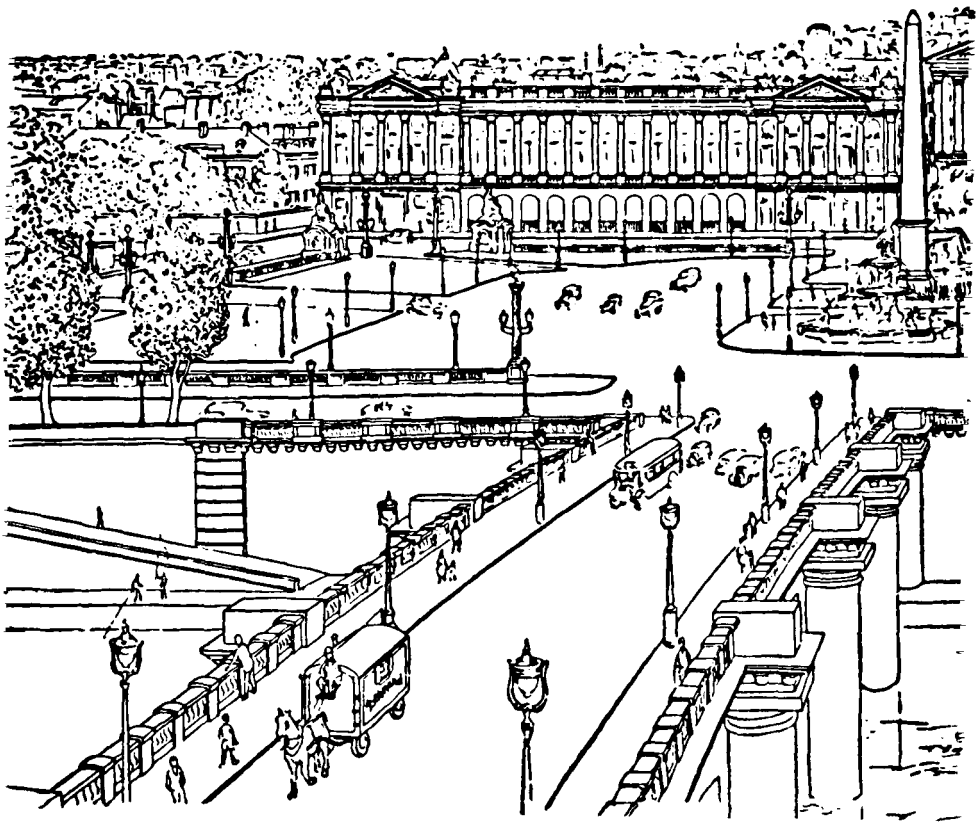

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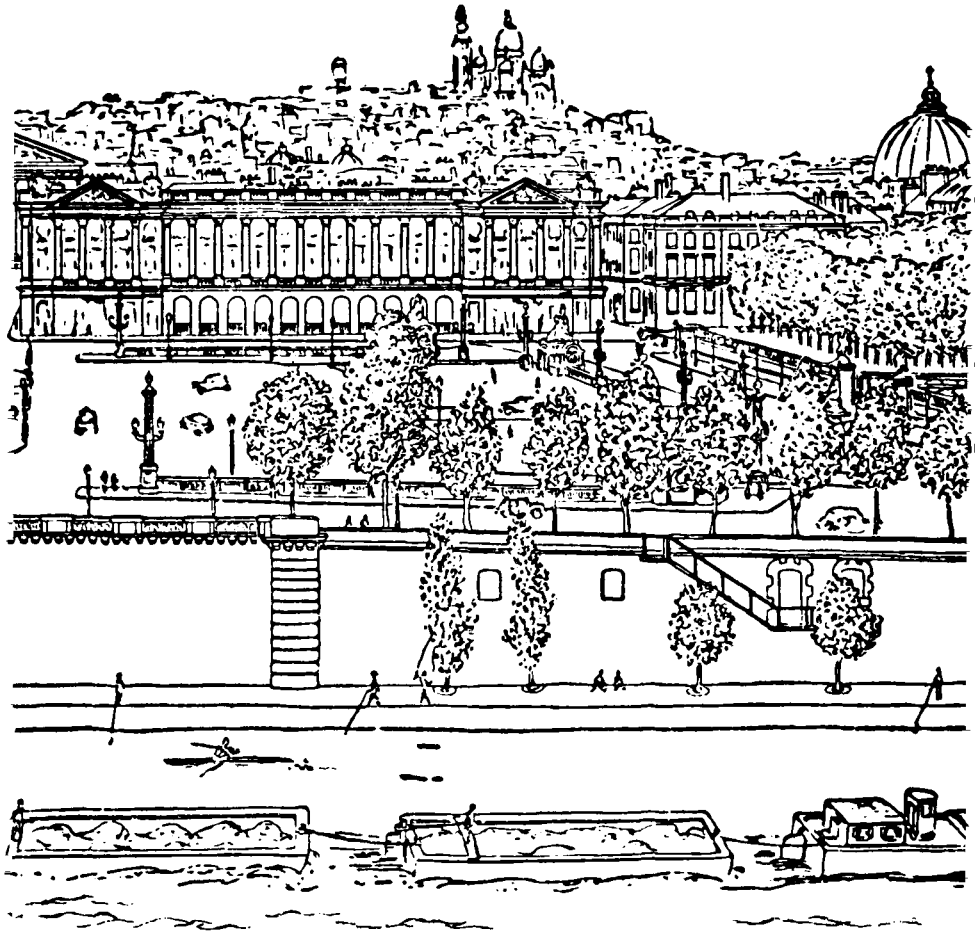

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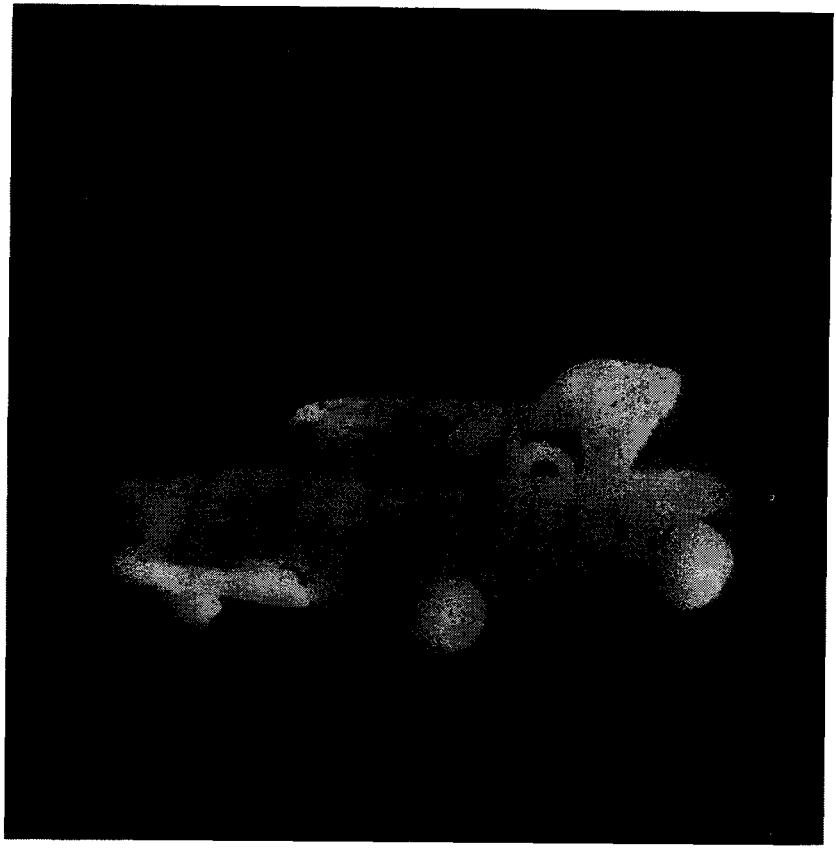

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James Laughlin (1914–1997) was a great friend to this magazine. Within a year of its founding in 1953 he urged its editors to stick to it—that the service that could be performed for their contemporaries was surely worth the effort. His remarkable publishing house and magazine have been an obvious inspiration over the years. As much in gratitude as in the hope of a glimpse into the workings of a brilliant editor and publisher, the *Review* ran an interview with Laughlin (conducted by Richard Zeigfield) through two issues of the magazine in the fall of 1983—the longest published to date. Thirteen of his poems have appeared over the years. Often, a note would arrive, praising an issue, suggesting a writer whose work we should see. We thought of him as a fellow-editor here, and always will.

—The Editors

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Tunga Tuggo, Lingua Dingua

Mark Richard

When Cyphus looked up from his raking and saw the black park ranger with his Smokey the Bear hat and his park service flashlight hip-mounted, a little cockily, like a faux firearm, in his heart of hearts Cyphus thought, This will either be Attitude or Uncle Tom. He said to young Samuel, Just let me do the talking. Samuel said weren't they lucky they had not bought the shovel, just the rakes, and Cyphus said it had not been *luck* that they had not bought the shovel, that he had *had* the sixteen dollars for the shovel, that it was just Samuel's *deficit of information* concerning the location of their mutual father, more importantly, their mutual father's *wallet* buried somewhere in these dunes. Cyphus asked, said furthermore, had Samuel ever *shoveled* sand before? and Samuel had said not really, and Cyphus explained, Sand just keeps filling itself in when you dig it, and when it's wet, forget it. Besides, having the rakes on the park preserve was bad enough, just let him do the talking.

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Hello! Cyphus called out in an ignorant touristy welcome-wagon sort of way, aware suddenly of the street clothes he was wearing, and young Samuel's cheap Mexican sombrero, way out in the preserve where no one ever came. They had walked long, and for Samuel, painful sandy miles leaving their car, their father's old limousine at the end of the asphalt. The park ranger said, Ya'll not digging up sea oats, are you? and Cyphus said no, no, they had seen the signs along the first quarter mile of trail, signs that said *Sea Oats Are Protected, No Fires, No Trespassing After Dark, Wild Ponies Kick and Bite*. The park ranger looked at Cyphus, looked at bashful sombrero-headed Samuel with his red rake and cumbersome-shod clubfoot, and then looked out over the autumn ocean. The ocean was as black and white as far and as boring as you could see.

No, no sea oats, officer, Cyphus said finally, bouncing his rake a little in the tideline on its SuperResilient tines. Cyphus wiped at nothing in his eye so he could read WESTBROOK on the park ranger's breastplate, but thought it a little early to use this information to work the ranger yet, so he tried this: Cyphus said, Are you from Baltimore? because Cyphus prided himself on his ear for accents, his ability to discern Emporia from west Tidewater where the peanuts give way to tobacco, and the park ranger said, Philadelphia, and Cyphus nodded his head knowingly in his knowing-dumbhead nod. But my *mother's* from Baltimore, the park ranger said, so Cyphus brightened and bravely bent his SuperResilient tines into the sand leaning farmerlike on the handle end and said, So, you can say *Baltimorean* was spoken in the home? The ranger looked at Cyphus and said, Don't y'all be digging up the sea oats, and he nimbly long-stepped up the steep face of the nearest dune in a way that would leave most people breathless from the effort, most people slogging up, grasping and ripping out sea oats to pull themselves along. Cyphus knew the ranger would linger just over the duneline, and the ranger knew Cyphus knew, and to establish this known fact Cyphus hollered over the duneline, So how many acres *are* in the preserve? and the ranger's disembodied head appeared Smokey-

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Bear-hatted and it looked out over Cyphus and Samuel into the black and whiteness, calculating, the head saying it expected it to be about twenty-two thousand acres, and Cyphus said, And how much of that is in sand? and the head said, Most all of it, and from his vowel rhythm Cyphus figured his father from south Jersey, maybe. The ranger held a wave, a hand that stayed on the duneline for a couple of moments after the head had disappeared, and Cyphus called out, Thank you, Officer Westbrook!

Twenty-two *thousand* acres, and you wanted to buy a shovel, Cyphus said to Samuel, Samuel who called himself a rocket scientist, living with an older sister in nearly condemned government housing outside the Redstone arsenal, Samuel able to give a patient listener the step-by-step evolution of the Apollo moon program beginning with the friendly internment of the V-2 Germans down in Huntsville after the war, a little of Samuel's lineage vapor-trailing around there, Samuel denying this heritage any time Cyphus professed an interest in hearing the genuine accent of a rocket Nazi crossed with an Alabama manure spreader.

Let's just go home, Samuel said, saying *home* when he was tired instead of *hideout* when he was not, the place where they slept in fact being neither, just a family beach house where no one really knew where they were and didn't really care, no one except the jury of relatives waiting at the family beach house every day for some report on the missing father, and more importantly, some pieces of paper gone missing with the missing father's wallet. These were relatives from three bloodlines, heirs of clouded sorts, eating and waiting, crab eggs, bacon dumplings, fried gourd, they would announce—chowchow, satsuma jack, beezle sticks, fixings from another planet, Cyphus would think as the platters were passed around in the morning, adding, saying to himself—arythmic heart, gouted foot, bloody stool. And in the evening, Cyphus and Samuel would "hide" the old limousine among some dumpsters, except on Thursdays, walk up the beach path just past sunset, and there they all would be, already out watching the rock-salt moon they had hung in the sky that week, lined

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up in those new high-back console plastic porch chairs they all hated, their white hair like helmets, globes of blue filaments lit by a single streetlight flickering on, one or two teased up heads especially halo-like, glowing and ready for departure. Hello! Cyphus would always call out in an attempt to mask his empty-handedness, and always everyone could hear nearly deaf Aunt Marty hiss, Shit.

Well, we not *going* home, Cyphus said, Cyphus dropping the contracted *are* in unconscious deference to Officer Westbrook, We not going home mainly because I can't stand the way they all talk anymore, those south harbor phonics and peanut roll drawl, god, the drool on Uncle Reston's bib, too, god.

I don't mind talking to them, said Samuel, him the only of the pair the relatives spoke to, them speaking to him of the beach-house improvements, the washer-dryer the spouses of the incontinent all chipped in for, the electronic atmospheric weather wind and rain station on the roof. Yes, where *is* that old junky thing on the wall Dad used to tap in the mornings, always wrong forecast, them eager enough to chuck his vestiges out as soon as he disappeared, thought Cyphus shouldering his rake, leading the march carward. Chuck his vestiges OUT! *Out* having two and a half syllables with a prominent *a* vowel sound best achieved when one's jaws are set in a static howling embouchure, them claiming their aches and pains better barometers than the spring-loaded kind anyway, which reminded them, when Cyphus asked where the old junky thing was, of the time when they had to wrap Aunt Irma in a rubber sheet when she died, was that scarlet fever or small pox? The virus alive for sixteen years in some old books they forgot to burn, and Cousin Gernice, greedy Cousin Gernice, took the books she wasn't *sposed* to, and her child now dead from page-thumbing (or most likely cover-chewing, or WORSE if it was a Gernice child), that'll teach you, Cyphus, about greed and reading, too, so that Cyphus had to leave the porch quickly rubbing the soft spot on his head, heading out to the beach where young Samuel flipped jellyfish over in the surf wash with his horned, callused clubfoot, ghosty

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things in the dim reaches of the streetlight, Samuel saying the top of the jellies were harmless, that it was only the tentacled bottom side that would scald your skin with neurotoxin, Samuel flipping one over and picking it up, holding it like a pie he was about to slap into Cyphus's face. Drop that jelly, had said Cyphus, put it down, I want to talk to you, and You too, said Samuel. Samuel said he had caught the drift it was believed their father was buried somewhere in the preserve dunes with his wallet and pieces of family paper and Cyphus said he had not heard that, but he *did* have the feeling that none of the pieces of family paper had his or Samuel's names on them, Cyphus beginning to explain his waning enthusiasm, beginning to resent their mantle of step-and-fetch-itism, Cyphus and Samuel the centrifugally thrown family outcasts from this tidewater outpost of thirteenth son anglospawn. Samuel in Alabama and Cyphus UP NAWTH, come down to pick through the leavings and cold trails and postulations from them who porch-sit and talk about everything but IT, the THANG of the missing father, the disappearance and supposed death, six days in the newspaper and no leads, and most tragically, no long black wallet well-oiled with greasy fingers spreading it open to purchase shit-property below list price from coloreds, for coloreds (by coloreds? them that KNEW Father put in the air, look at the nostril flare and lip fat on THAT son), just get the wallet so they could all go home. Like the lady who came to claim her drowned husband in the freak charter boat rollover just offshore, twenty-five folk tipped off the upended decks into the sea, almost all drowning drunk, and more than one wife coming down to the harbor police office where the dead fishermen were laid out on ferry benches, coming down just to fetch the car keys and the money-stuffed wallets out of the sport-fishermen's pockets, the one saying over her shoulder, leaving, to the harbor police sergeant when he asked about the disposition of the body, her saying, He like fish so much, feed him to them. That's us, you and me, Samuel, Cyphus said, fishwives come to fetch, and to tell you the truth, I'm getting tired of it, tired of the way people talk to us, saying, Just die off, you and your family. Just be dead,

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is what people told Cyphus and Samuel as they poked around and made their inquiries, someone obviously having to spell it out to their father so he would understand it well enough; the father's ransacked house, his gutted office, him gone missing, some people even saying the previous weekend at a fish fry that Cyphus and Samuel had reconnoitered that of all the people born in the area that no one since Nat Turner had needed killing as much, further stating that it was unfortunate the body (the word *body* implying to Cyphus's junior detective mind father flesh corruption rather than hightail antic), unfortunate that the body had not yet been found yet so that they could saw off the head with a jagged cypress board and pike it on some crossroads somewhere, maybe near the new Wal-Mart, icon against housing shod artists, hog farmer shysters intent on letting negroes have a place to live with paved roads and fire hydrants, goddamn it, and looking closer, leaning in, spilling their draft beer out of their paper cups onto Samuel and Cyphus's shoes, on closer inspection, didn't Samuel look a LOT like their father, and suddenly Cyphus saw how it could all turn ugly, pitchforks and cattail torches, hunting them down through the swamp with baying hounds and bad postures, to hack off Samuel's head in absentia, a passable reproduction, a Pappy likeness, the hacking off achieving the desired aging process to bring the item current, so they fled the fish fry, kept to the anonymous interstates and off the secondary roads at night, hiding the limousine amongst the dumpsters in the evenings except on Thursdays, going home to the beach cottage they were beginning to call their hideout, to their own people, the sort willing to wrap their own kind in rubber sheets and burn them as a matter of convenience like household rubbish out back of the family place, a place where Cyphus told Samuel they were absolutely not going back to that night and maybe never again. Period.

So Cyphus and Samuel began walking back to their father's limousine, stopping every once in a while to rake at a driftwood hand, or cowrie-shell ear, or a spinal column of old rope, the whole time Cyphus feeling Officer Westbrook's spying eyes just over the wind-sharpened duneline. Cyphus felt suddenly

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unlucky, that Officer Westbrook may have recognized them as Darrell Dontell Boyd progeny, Samuel's thumb-spread putty cheeks, his own slouch beneath chip-bearing shoulders, something in the way Officer Westbrook looked into their faces and then fixed on a point in the black and white ocean, a pixel dot in a missing persons newspaper photo composite shot they were congenitally part of. Damn, Smokey Bear hat here, Smokey Bear hat there, how did he move back and forth so quickly on either side of the trail when the trail turned inland, the mystery revealed when Cyphus heard a horse bluster, or whatever he thought that blowout snort noise they make is called. They were tired and the sun was filing itself off on the rough smog edge of the horizon. Cyphus was ready for a drink, Samuel's painful clubfoot had him nearly teary-eyed. They arrived through the last sand walkway to the park-preserve parking lot and immediately saw that someone had stolen their car.

Cyphus was anticipating a couple of paperwork problems at the ranger station. Cyphus himself would not have reported the car stolen if not so pressed by Officer Westbrook after Officer Westbrook watched Cyphus and Samuel walk around bewildered looking into the sand where the car had been as if the earth had opened and somehow swallowed it there. If it had been just Cyphus, alone, he would have hiked on out to the highway where he had seen a little roadhouse tavern and called a cab or hitched a ride to the Greyhound station and made his way back to New York. He had been for quitting this quest altogether, you remember. But there had been Officer Westbrook with his little Chincoteague pony and there had been Samuel with his clubfoot and there had been the car stolen off federal property, and soon they were trundling through the sand to Officer Westbrook's ranger station, darkness on them. Samuel's clubfoot had him almost openly weeping so Officer Westbrook let him ride the pony but the large red rakes spooked the horse. It would not budge unless Cyphus walked in front of him, so Cyphus led the way, the rakes fanned out in front of him, Officer Westbrook leading the

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bridled pony, Samuel beatifically atop, Cyphus looking back occasionally and thinking it was all a little too damn much like Joseph and Mary and Palm Sunday all rolled up together for his taste.

The paperwork problems Cyphus was anticipating were going to arise from two things: Cyphus had no registration because he supposed the registration was still with his father in the long black wallet, or in the glove compartment or in the possession of his father's longtime driver, Mr. Buck; and secondly, probably more problematic, Cyphus and Samuel had driven the car off a federal impound lot in Portcity after it had been seized by federal agents following Darrell Dontell Boyd's disappearance. Cyphus and Samuel had gone there just to look in the trunk for the wallet with the pieces of family paper in it, and the keys were tucked in the visor and the chain-link gate was open. Cyphus jumped in, commanded the hesitant Samuel to do the same, and they drove off the lot. No one tried to stop them because no one was around. Things like that happen. It was lunchtime.

The Boyd relatives had been much encouraged, at first, when Cyphus and Samuel pulled up to the beach cottage in the old limousine. The last it had been heard of was from Mr. Buck's incoherent recollections of where he had left it before being roughed up by the Navy SEALs, Mr. Buck's story of Darrell Dontell Boyd's last sighting evolving constantly but not entirely suspiciously yet because everyone knew all about Mr. Buck, eighty-eight years old and never sober past age fourteen. Mr. Buck drove our city's boulevards diverting traffic into medians and people's yards as he scrunched his neck, rolling eyeballs skyward to watch for explosive fuel tanks falling off Navy trainers, having had a close call once, certain his fate would be a fiery one, his clothes sprayed with flame retardant so that in the hot weather he smelled like a kerosene leak in a homeless shelter. Mr. Buck lived in the limousine, slept in the back waiting for Dontell Boyd, bathed occasionally in Dontell Boyd's garage whenever Dontell insisted, Mr. Buck's few possessions, some canned goods, a canteen, paperbacks, pint-bottle stash, were kept in a Derby Farms tomato

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box in the trunk. Mr. Buck ate his cheese-cracker breakfasts during his daily morning cry squatting head bent against the front bumper. In this way, the Boyd relatives long considered Mr. Buck an unashamed moocher.

Officer Westbrook's office was a brown-painted plywood parks department toolshed add-on with sun-damaged windows and little cheap trifold brochures depicting the abundant vermin-like wildlife. Cyphus relaxed. No computer, no telephone, no one else there but the three of them past closing time to fill out the federal form for Lost Property, that form being one of the three Officer Westbrook had in his five-generation government desk with the sticking drawers, the second form to be signed by hikers agreeing not to hold the federal government liable if on the seventeen-mile nature hike through razor scrub and quicksand one would be gored by wild tusked boar, succumb to heat maladies, be struck by lightning, or be bitten by one or more of the four poisonous snakes indigenous to and plentiful in the park preserve. The third form in Officer Westbrook's desk was an application for summer employment.

What galled Cyphus as he filled in the fictions of his life on the Lost Property form was the developing friendliness between Officer Westbrook and Samuel. They had been talking all along the trail and now Cyphus noticed they came courting toward one another across the South by stretching their regional tongues, so to speak, so they would touch, so to speak. Samuel was straining his long *O*s to roll them up from Huntsville across Asheville, and Officer Westbrook had dropped the *ing* ring down from Baltimore through Richmond hooking a right at Charlotte to meet Samuel somewhere around Hickory, North Carolina. Somehow they had run an old wives' tale about caterpillar hair as a cold weather indicator into a crawling sexual metaphor and were laughing a little too damn freely for Cyphus's taste as he tried to make up an insurance serial number and scratch it from the end of a faulty Darrell Dontell Boyd for Assembly TIME TO BOIL OFF SOME OF THE FAT ink pen he had found in the front seat of the

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limousine. He could not wait to get Samuel outside and pinch his arm.

Why don't you and Officer Westbrook just get a room together? Cyphus said to young Samuel as they waited for Officer Westbrook to put up his pony and take them into town. Samuel said Cyphus ought to hear what he sounded like, and Cyphus said he knew what he sounded like because he had recorded himself many times on a reel of tape and Samuel said, You sound homoneurotic, is what you sound like. Samuel told Cyphus he could be nicer to Officer Westbrook since he was going to take them where they needed to go, and besides, Officer Westbrook had problems at home. First off, said Cyphus, it's the damned least Officer Westbrook can do to give them a ride considering he should spend more time protecting people's cars than snooping over sand dunes making sure they didn't dig up any goddamn sea-oat weeds, and secondly, what kind of problems could Officer Westbrook possibly have at home that would concern Samuel and Samuel said, Shh, here he comes, he got his girlfriend pregnant the very first time they had sex, she was a virgin and it was on a church weekend social.

This is exactly the kind of compassionate quasi-negroidal crap that got our father into the gritty fix he's in somewhere in these dunes, said Cyphus.

Maybe so, said Samuel, but he's going to take us to see Father.

Officer Westbrook's headlights swept out over the low-budget horrorscape in his brand new four-wheel-drive jeep, Samuel in the front seat jibbering Affirmative Faith nonsense with the park ranger, a doubting Cyphus seething in the back seat, cross-armed, suspecting some sort of homeless Dontell Boyd look-alike bait-and-switch con game ahead, or at the very least, Officer Westbrook's interest in Samuel did not range beyond some sort of orthopedophilic predilection. Cyphus was so angry he didn't even kick the sand off his shoes getting into Officer Westbrook's jeep. Where the sandy asphalt dead-ended into the county highway Cyphus looked up out of his funk at the lights of the little roadhouse tavern and shouted,

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pointing past the startled heads of Officer Westbrook and Samuel, Wait! Look! There's the car!

Under a penitentiary-strength vapor light beside the Baja Bar, the limousine was parked, or at least, considering its angle of approach, perhaps abandoned. The Baja Bar was a plank-porched place grown out of a chicken-coop watering hole for the local swineherders, the hog muck from their wallow boots scraped off in huge confections on the edges of the front steps. Inside Cyphus and Samuel would find framed on the walls the original rabid crayonesque constituent letters Baja patrons had sent to editors and legislators concerning all perils, mostly imagined, never thought-out, threatening every arcane aspect of the dynamic hog farming industry, particularly the growing reluctance on the government's behalf to subsidize sow bellies; there were hog cartoons, hog photographs—hogs in hats, hogs behind the wheel, Miss Pork Products Queen (no Miss Piggy Cyphus noticed), all this framed in cheap brass frames adorned with huge screws, all this hanging beneath the cheap nautical crap with that copper cast to it, a couple of ship models frosted with dust and spider mite configuration rigging, all of this lending the Baja, Cyphus decided, an esprit of pigs at sea.

Cyphus would discover this alone, as Officer Westbrook and Samuel would not get out of the jeep and come into the Baja Bar. The white people who came down to the preserve and asked Officer Westbrook's help and asked him questions were different animals to the ones who collected here at the Baja, the ones collecting here still living "deep country," tall trees hung with long ropes and chains in their lower acres (shade-tree mechanic, they would say), huge cast iron kettles for boiling down two-hundred pound plus fleshy animals (soap making, they would say), scythes, picks, axes handy (because there's always something needing killing on a farm, they would say). Officer Westbrook would wait for Cyphus for a few minutes but he would not go in, and Samuel would not go in, and in this bird-in-the-hand equation, Cyphus decided to cut his losses in favor of retrieving the limousine to drive back up

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north. Well, then, good-bye, said Samuel, and God bless, said Officer Westbrook.

And good riddance, Cyphus had said, slamming the jeep door, relieved at relinquishing his role in the wild chasing of Father Goose, already considering how best to hold his red plastic rake so as not to draw attention to it as he entered the bar but also to maintain the rake in some posture of readiness to deploy against the car thief or thieves in case things took their typical ugly turn. He decided nonchalant defiance was the best course. He entered the Baja Bar with the rake shouldered, whistling.

There was only the bartender talking to a waiter at the end of a bar, behind them a huge aquarium filled with silvery moons of a small school of feline-toothed piranha slicing hungrily in one body back and forth across the front glass. No one sat at the booths, and one stool stood pulled away from a wet place on the bar, the wet place floating drinking debris; an empty beer glass, crumpled cigarette pack, ashtray, paperback and the limousine key ring. The bartender and the waiter stopped talking to stare at Cyphus. There was no music, no sound except the aquarium, air bubbling from a little plastic sea chest in the coarse sand next to a class ring dropped in for a joke or possibly the result of some macho tequila piranha finger-dipping challenge. The only sound beyond that was a toilet flushing in the rear, then the banging open of the ladies' room door announcing the stumbling exit of a zipper-stuck and muttering Mr. Buck.

Hello! Cyphus offered, entering the place, raised hand, red rake snagging a diving helmet hung from the ceiling like a submarine severed head. Cyphus continued halfway down the bar and sat next to the pulled-out stool, staring at the puddle of beer on the bar soaking the crumpled cigarette pack and the keyring to the limousine. He settled the rake tine-scraping against the foot rail and waited for Mr. Buck to pinball his way against every six by six post that held up the Baja's sheet-metal roof.

Whut's yer poizzin? the bartender spun a cocktail napkin deftly floating in front of Cyphus, Cyphus still watching the

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sometimes redundant staggering of Mr. Buck ever closer to his bar stool.

I'll have whatever this gentleman is having, Cyphus said.

Hey! shouted the bartender to the waiter. 'E wants whut ta "gintilmun's" habbing!

Gib it to 'um! said the waiter, his tongue licking through a black gap in his gumline.

One SPECIAL comin' yer way! the bartender shouted at Cyphus and Cyphus reached around with his foot for the rake handle, thinking things were off on an ugly dangerous footing here, his accent-spotting needle warped like a compass over iron agate slabbing, the bartender shouting to Mr. Buck—Hey! GINTILMUN, ya wunt another fuckin' SPECIAL? Mr. Buck frightened himself by withdrawing his hand from his filthy flame-retardant raincoat and mistook his fingers trembling up at his face as dancing serpents. The vision set him in reverse on his journey to the bar stool, all the way back beneath the poster of a Peterbilt blonde in bikini top and jeans cutoffs onto which someone had drawn a crude and uncircumcised penis.

TWO Specials, comin' right up! shouted the bartender.

Cyphus saw, on a plate by the register with a paper napkin thrown over it, a little plasticine baggie and a short fruit knife, hog tranquilizer cut with strychnine, probably.

Two specials, the bartender said, reminding himself. He bent into the cooler and the piranha in the aquarium on top of the cooler fluttered themselves against the glass trying to bite off his head. He withdrew a large bag of goldfish and trapped a couple against the side of the clear plastic with a cocktail stirrer. Carefully, he dropped one of the fish into a glass of beer.

One, he said.

Make it a double, said the rotten waiter.

Nue, sir, said the bartender, the GINtilmun only requestud a special, not a double special. The other fish dripped onto the floor. The bartender's tremors were making it a little difficult to trap another fish against the side of the bag. Commere ya

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little fuckers, he said, smearing a little gold into a crease of plastic with the long metal spoon.

Cyphus triangulated the low country swine talk, inbred lost colony white trash mixed with the deserters from Cornwallis's prison army at Yorktown, getting a fix on the bartender, the rotten-tooth waiter having maybe one parent of certified tobacco road trailer trash. Cyphus was of a mind to ease nearer the limousine keys when he felt a skeletal hand grab his shoulder, pulling a clutch of his shirt.

Hello! said Cyphus to Mr. Buck when Mr. Buck was mostly on the stool next to him and able to release Cyphus's shirt he seemed to have forgotten he was holding on to. Cyphus's greeting bolted Mr. Buck upright and awake, and in deference to using Cyphus's shoulder to leverage himself up to the bar, he scowled at Cyphus with a long moment of exaggerated recognition he was completely unable to disguise.

Don't you dare touch me, hissed Mr. Buck, leaning independently now on his filthy, chemical-smelling raincoat elbows, trying to cut what he thought were menacing eyes toward the weak-smiling Cyphus.

Laying a hand on me would be mistake number one for you, he said. WHERE'S MY DRINK? he suddenly shouted, mostly into Cyphus's face.

Her' we go, two specials, and the bartender set the foamy glasses down with hands that rocked the swimming fish inside like tidal currents. Cyphus raised his finger to point at the goldfish pecking the bottom of the lagerhead in Mr. Buck's glass but Mr. Buck slapped the hand away.

When people lay a hand on me, like on my shoulder, that's when they're most vulnerable, said Mr. Buck, slowly lifting his dripping glass from the bar top. That's when I grab holt of them and break their fucking wrists.

Mr. Buck's blind mouth sucked in all of the foam and half the beer, including a frantic, backwards-swimming goldfish. He swallowed. Snap, and then snap, he said, licking his lips, and then both your wrists is fucking broke.

Cyphus watched the partially crushed goldfish in his glass

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weakly drag its entrails through his beer, the little mouth pulsing a slow gaping mute.

Go ahead, said Mr. Buck to Cyphus. The waiter and the bartender watched from the end of the bar. No one was smiling now. Go ahead, just pretend, said Mr. Buck. I won't really break your wrists. Go ON, gottdamnit, said Mr. Buck and he shoved Cyphus almost off his stool.

Trouble down there, GINtilmun?

I want another drink, said Mr. Buck, pushing his empty glass toward the bartender.

All we gots tunight's ur specials, said the bartender directly to Cyphus.

Then give me another special, said Mr. Buck.

You got money to pay fur them specials?

Mr. Buck slid into a stance, his hand grinding into the pocket of his human-grease-soaked coarse khakis. First they grab my shoulder, then they grab my arm, that's when I break their wrists, he said. Mr. Buck triumphantly pulled a wad of singles out of his pocket and said to the dollars tenderly, Then I break their knees. He stuffed the money back into his pocket and climbed onto the bar stool. He turned right around to Cyphus.

Sometimes when they're down, I like to kick them in the face, he said.

Charming, said Cyphus.

You going to drink that? Mr. Buck said to Cyphus's dying beer.

Cyphus slid his glass over to Mr. Buck.

I want to ask you about your car, the car out front, said Cyphus.

It ain't for sale, Mr. Buck said.

I know, said Cyphus, it belongs to my father. Have you seen him?

Mr. Buck drained the glass and slammed it down on the bar top. Now I got to piss again, gottdamnit, he announced, and it was clearly Cyphus's fault.

The bartender set two new foaming, swimming specials on the bar in front of Cyphus. Ur what's looking fur yur ol' man?

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I was, said Cyphus, and Cyphus found himself drawing one of the glasses toward him in a gesture to inspire camaraderie with this hog farmering-Hessian-descended sadist.

I hurt 'bout sum dawgs digging up a bum o'er to the game PREE-serve. Sum ladee touris' spot a thum' stickin' up fum a dune, by the tyme she got the nigra park ranger ut there the wil' dawgs dun carrit most o' the gud stuff away!

HAW! said the waiter slapping his hand on the bar.

I'm speaking of Darrell Boyd, Darrell Dontell Boyd, said Cyphus, my father, he said.

Aye, he cum round here campaignin, that's the one, said the bartender. Pesterin' peoples 'bout votin' fur 'im, handin' ut the writin' pens and nail cutters.

Mr. Buck came back from the ladies' room, his clothes soaking wet, water dripping off his face onto the bar.

I fell in, he said.

But have you seen my father since? said Cyphus.

Seed the sum bitch onct since he disappeared like, cum in here dressed in a trash bag, I says tu him Whut? Darrell, Howloween early dis year? You comin round here dressed like a lying sack o' shit?

HAW! said the waiter.

Mr. Buck drained his special and set the empty glass down on the bar.

I loved the old man, the old man's like a father to me, he said, with chin-quivering sentiment.

The bartender opened the cash register. Here's his 'ouse bill, he said. Yur here tuh pay, right? the bartender said, nodding to the rotten-tooth waiter. The bolt the waiter slid across the door was like Fort Apache, Cyphus thought.

Cyphus tipped the bill toward the light to read it. This is not his signature, he said.

Yup, he signed fur all the specials tha' night he cum in, said the bartender, rolling a baseball bat along the edge of the bar top now.

The waiter took the saucer down off the top of the aquarium and went into a booth to chop up some lines with the fruit knife.

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I never put the old man's car in the ditch, sobbed Mr. Buck. I put my own car in the ditch and I put my truck in the ditch but I never put the old man's car in the ditch, he said.

Last time I put my car in the ditch somebody stole a cooler of fish out of the trunk, said Mr. Buck, his head up, remembering. When I come back with my truck to pull my car out of the ditch, the fish and the cooler was both gone.

The waiter snorted twice and then tinked the blade of the fruit knife on the edge of the saucer. The bartender looked over there and sniffed his upper lip.

Las call, said the bartender and he wrote a bill for Mr. Buck.

What's this? he said.

Yur bill, says the bartender.

I wasn't finished drinking, said Mr. Buck. I didn't finish my special.

Ur finished, pay up, said the bartender.

Gottdamnit, said Mr. Buck.

Cyphus took all the money he had left in the world and put it on the counter to pay his father's phony tab. He knew it was never going to be enough. Mr. Buck picked up the bills, ripped them into pieces, and threw them over the bartender's head like confetti.

There's your fucking tip, said Mr. Buck.

Everyone watched the bartender carefully shake his fingers in the sink, wipe his hands on a rag, and walk patiently around the end of the bar to take hold of Mr. Buck. He laid one hand on Mr. Buck's shoulder and then he pulled Mr. Buck's arm sharply behind his back.

Now I got you! said Mr. Buck. Mr. Buck twisted and spun around so that suddenly the bartender stood holding an empty, worn-out raincoat.

Every chicken white-meat muscle in Mr. Buck's shirtless trembling torso went into grabbing a stool and shoving it toward the bartender. Looking for something more substantial to fling, Mr. Buck tipped over to a large booth table that was bolted to the floor. His effort was so great, his buffalo-wing muscles gathering so much of what strength he still possessed, that in lifting the huge oak table over his head, he in fact

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merely jerked himself forward across the immovable tabletop rapping soundly his forehead into unconsciousness, falling quickly and with no theatrics to the floor.

'E's nut dun thut before, considered the bartender, wadding up the raincoat and chucking it onto Mr. Buck.

Someone was kicking in the door.

Officer Westbrook and Samuel had crept up on the porch of the bar. From their vantage point, the little salt-crusted porthole in the front door, they had not seen the waiter with the fruit knife in the booth, but they *had* seen the softball bat rolling on the bar top and had seen Mr. Buck go down. Officer Westbrook had developed immensely powerful legs dune-climbing, which were in fact his saving grace with his awful shrew when the kitchen-utensil throwing had ended and she had locked her ankles in that way behind his, and with these strong legs, when he had seen the bartender draw a peg-leg shotgun from under the bar and point it toward Cyphus fending off the fruit knife with the red plastic rake, Officer Westbrook kicked in the door.

Salt, neglect and rust had corrupted the old shells in the peg leg and it did not fire, so the bartender dropped it as Officer Westbrook covered the escape of Cyphus, his hand on his malignant-looking flashlight holster, pointing it alternately at the bartender and the waiter by cocking his hip first to the left and then to the right, backing carefully out of the Baja, careful not to trip on the splintered door cockeyed on the floor.

Follow us, said Officer Westbrook to Cyphus standing in the parking lot holding his rake in one hand and a wrist of Mr. Buck in the other. It had seemed the decent thing to do to drag the head-knocked and nattering limp figure out of the Baja and down the rough uneven steps. He wasn't even that heavy, really, and Cyphus was able to do it one-handed, thinking he would stuff Mr. Buck in the back of Officer Westbrook's jeep, but there it went in sand dust and taillights, and Cyphus was left with the little shirtless man. Cyphus was certain that if he left Mr. Buck in the parking lot by dawn a fish truck or a four-wheel-drive utility vehicle would flatten

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him into the muck, so Cyphus shoved the muttering Mr. Buck into the back of the limousine and in the darkness accidentally closed the door on his hand, wincing in compassion at the crunch.

The sand trails and taillights leading deep into the little park-preserve pony stables began to depress Cyphus even more than his crushing indifference to the high-school football game on the limousine radio. Tie game, Marlins and Sharks. Officer Westbrook led them to the wild-pony pens and corral where Boy Scouts earned merit badges breaking the little horses that were ridable and shooting and skinning the ones that were not.

Officer Westbrook wheeled the jeep into the turnaround near some plain plank stables. He may still be out, he said to Cyphus, let's go look.

Out where? said Cyphus. It was noisy when he killed the engine, crickets and bullfrogs and alligator bellows and the constant metal ripping of light industry echoed by the lowering marine layer blotting out the night sky. The marine layer was infected pink from the nearby industrial park's vapor lights, and the base shaft of a thunderhead thickening in the northeast sky was tumid with brilliant stadium glare.

Cyphus cocked his ear toward dim crowd roar. Last week the Sharks's head cheerleader ran across the field and broke some girl's arm in the visitors' stands, Officer Westbrook said. Sometimes she comes out here and lays out naked, smoking dope. She says she's had two abortions. She wears spurs. She got a tattoo look like a man's organ.

Will we be required to disinter our father or will wild dogs fetch him piece by piece? said Cyphus.

Officer Westbrook disappeared into a place where things snorted and kicked. Cyphus turned to Samuel.

All right, if we get the wallet, we split it down the middle and part ways. I'll take the car back home and you can figure out your end with Smokey the Bear here, said Cyphus.

The car doesn't belong to you, said Samuel.

You can't drive, said Cyphus.

That's not the point, said Samuel.

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Shhhhh! Officer Westbrook shushed them, coming out of the stables with his flashlight unholstered and turned to the dim, wide-reach setting. Your father will see you now, he said.

The very corpulent Darrell Dontell Boyd reclined against a pony blanket and hay in a feeding trough fixed to the open side of an empty shed, the sharp stamping of ponies in the corral raised dust in the lantern Officer Westbrook lit. Dontell Boyd's hair was wet and pushed back, his girth was swaddled in enormous Fruit of the Looms, his bare knees were scraped from recently negotiating a moderate surf and the uneven beach shelf. A large black plastic trash bag covered his shoulders like a shawl, and it was pinned at the throat with an office folder clip. He did not rise from the manger when Officer Westbrook brought forth Cyphus and Samuel, he maintained his open-browed gaze toward the bolus of stadium glare burning in the northeast.

Father, Samuel said, approaching the manger. It was not necessary nor profitable to kneel, the manger being almost chest high. To kneel would put you beneath the scene in hoofprints.

Darrell Boyd reached out his hand toward his young son to confer some type of blessing. He then drew Officer Westbrook's ear close to his mouth and began whispering loudly in a language Cyphus's sensitive ear cocked around, a confounding spectrum of speculative Yiddish, West Malaysian and a latinated Cherokee.

Your father is happy to see you, too, Cyphus, said Officer Westbrook in a tone Cyphus felt was a little too condescending for his taste. Your father is happy you have come to witness the great revelations, sends his regards to the remaining family sitting in darkness, and wonders what's with the rake?

What's wrong with him, why doesn't he speak normally to me, said Cyphus.

He is speaking normally, Officer Westbrook said with a brilliant smile.

Now, look here, Pops, Cyphus said. This wouldn't be my first choice of a hideout, but it somehow seems to suit you

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and, possibly, you'll be able to lose some weight in the process. The family has sent Samuel and myself out to look for some papers they believe you are carrying so it's best you just hand over your wallet.

Officer Westbrook laughed in Cyphus's face as Cyphus made a move toward Darrell Boyd.

What your father is bringing to the world is more precious than anything written on paper, Officer Westbrook said. Your father has been chosen. Every night he swims out to the bottom of the sea where angels are preparing for the second coming.

He can't swim, he almost drowned as a child, said Cyphus.

Officer Westbrook laughed again and adjusted the Hefty CinchSak robe around Dontell Boyd's shoulders. Dontell Boyd gazed upon the fiery column of stadium light burning in the northeast.

At the bottom of the sea angels are collecting, sharpening their swords and shodding their feet to come marching out of the waves. They tell your father wonderful things, and give him the trinkets that man has cast upon the ocean floor, said Officer Westbrook.

They haven't by any chance found his wallet, have they? Cyphus asked.

No, said Officer Westbrook, but they have given him this, and Officer Westbrook pulled from his pocket a piece of gold.

Wow, a gold doubloon, said Samuel.

Let me see that, said Cyphus. Cyphus studied the crude piece of eight and immediately recognized it as the piece of slag metal spray painted gold Darrell Dontell Boyd used to carry in his wallet to foil unsuspecting tourons sweeping the beaches with their metal detectors. It was a great game Dontell used to play on the beach for his friends looking on from the plateglass windows of the Thunderbird Lounge. You would drop the slag in the path of the metal-sweeping short-pants-black-socks touron and just before they reach it you step in and snatch it up announcing, A gold doubloon! Wow! Right here in the sand! Gosh, if I hadn't of just seen it I guess YOU'D of picked it up! Wow! A once in a lifetime find! And the gallery in the Thunderbird would watch the touron rip his

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headphones off his livid-faced head and then fling the several-hundred-dollar metal detector into the surf, the shorts almost falling down with the effort, its pockets jingly with the summer's vacation treasure finds so far—a nickel and a quarter's worth of lost bathing suit change and a rusted Holiday Inn room key.

This is nothing, Cyphus said, flipping the coin into Darrell's ample lap. I want the wallet this came from and I want it now.

A snarling and ratching near the gate set off some hindkicking among the horses, and the air went high with whinnies and then low with a distant Marlin score.

Somethin's in with the horses, said Officer Westbrook. Could be a panther!

The ponies galloped round and round the emerging panther presupposer, a little white shirtless man with a galaxy of gold flecks sparkling his puny chest, pasted there with bile and sour beer.

Somebody call off these dogs, gottdamnit, said Mr. Buck.

A small stampede of Chincoteague horse color suddenly broached the gate and charged Cyphus, trying to bite the SuperResilient tines with their terrible mouths. Several hundred pounds of horseflesh shouldered Cyphus backwards into the manger at Dontell Boyd's feet.

Esso bactoro factum dicta funk, said Dontell.

That's a lie, said Cyphus, rolling white-eyed, regaining his wind, spitting straw. You . . . phonetic imposter!

Ogan block! commanded Dontell Boyd, standing. Ogan block de yevuh ah here ruh!

Officer Westbrook and Samuel fell to their knees in the dust, Samuel a little stiffly.

Do what he says, Samuel said to Cyphus as Cyphus rolled out of the trough.

I don't even *know* what he's saying, said Cyphus, Cyphus crawling around the perimeter of lantern light searching for his rake. Just as soon as he could lay his hands on it, he would help send this, their father, back into the sea.

Osta la bean ba! announced Darrell Dontell Boyd.

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It's another message from the First Jesus Under the Living Water! said Officer Westbrook. He's speaking in tongues! said Officer Westbrook. Isn't it wonderful?

Yes, yes, I hear it now! Cyphus said, standing, bouncing his tines in great anticipation. I can hear it, the summons of the Scuba Christ! he said, saying, to himself, Remember to be careful. The footing in the shore break will be crumbly this time of year, the undertow deceptively strong.

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Beth Gylys

The Trouble with Love Poems about Men

They're not of curves and shadows made.
They don't wear skirts to swoop and tease
the eye, nor toss their hair, nor sway.
So arduous to package men to please:
a slant of hip, or buttocks tucked in faded
jeans—they lack aesthetic flair. A spray

of curls might fan their brows, or bellies bloom
above their belts. To paint men in the best
of light, requires certain skill. The groom
looks better if he's built. He'll fill
his tux with sculpted flesh. His chest
will taper to the cummerbund. Still,

what work to capture men's appeal!
A rise between the legs will also shade
and shape their usual lines. Alas, revealed,
the bulge is but a stick. We live dismayed.
It's difficult to bring men warm regard.
We try. Their love is always hard.

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Three Poems by Martha Hollander

Election Night

The first Tuesday in this warm November
brushes Long Island in a last caress
before winter repels our communities
like a storm door slamming on a windy day.
Gentle enough, in fact, for the beach.
Here to beckon to the Indian sunset
are joggers with their superb, joyful dogs,
a few rebels beating the commute,
and a pair of lovers murmuring to the crunch
of sand in the folds of their heavy leather jackets.
Change, they all desire change, a radiant
new face, or a world awash in truth

like the wet shore starving for the waves
that break, rush forward and collapse on it,
shimmering green and gold, salty, spent.
Everyone will still be home by nine.
But as they step behind their curtains tonight,
who can begrudge them their defining acts
of longing, stern hope, audacity, contempt?
The sun gives way to the penetrating lamp
of the local polling place. Citizens all,
they move their hands over the humble, battered
body of the nation, while their fingers
make full utterance: I want, I want.

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Vermeer's Girl Asleep at a Table

Until the end of the seventeenth century,
no one was ever left alone.
—Philippe Ariès

The house is humming with many lives today.
Too drowsy even for a slice of apple
or her own glass of wine, she prepares
to dream of nothing, to dream her life away.

What kind of life? The man in the next room
whose dandyish red coat and jaunty hat
fail to mask his eager hesitation?
The dog who lopes toward him, hoping for food,
a pat or a walk? These usual companions
whose loving negotiation colors the day
are for X rays only: part of the painting's dream.

The pitcher waits for him, standing guard
over his fallen glass. The carpet rises
like a wave agitated into complex
patterns of desire. The chair sails off
toward somewhere else entirely, where
its gilded lions' heads, twin commanders
of the animal realm, are calling out for him.

But I'm still here, believe me, and I'm ready.
If she woke up and saw you, she would say
"Go away until I'm finished." Careful!
I know. The closer you get, the more the mirror
threatens to drown you in its gray syrup
suspended in a frame of a frame of a frame,
as the world of I and You and They and We
dissolves into a membrane riddled with light.

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The Fish Roundabout

The fish circle the seas a thousand times
a day, never diverging from the endless
path of blue opening up before them.
Like the worm of eternity swallowing
its tail, they swim in a perpetual circle,

unaware that it is only a circle
of generic liquid, lovingly cooled and lit
to resemble the distant oceans of their birth.
Here in the Academy of Science, each one
hurtles ahead of all the other ones

fleeing the spasms of traffic that occur
when an unseen intelligence shifts the current.
If they could pause—impossible in this current
fish race—and look beyond the pulsing
screen of fellow fish, they would see us:

bluish humans wandering in the dark,
bashfully colliding, slow to see.
Leaving the ring of fish, a wraparound
video of living waves, we swim
through western territory in our finned

and silvery car. We part the salty air
like the stern old bass plowing its way
through a mesh of flickering sardines,
or like the musical sea lion gliding
joyously in reverse, flippers folded

in contemplation over its domed chest.
The road surges ahead into an endless
gray channel bound by lines of foam
redrawn each passing second, pulsing with
the beat of on- and off-ramps, lampposts, signs.

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Once we stop the car, wriggle in the seatbelts
as if jerking on the end of a line
and open the doors, the fishy silence breaks.
Coming up for air, we scatter a fusillade
of spray, like earthly swimmers doing their mad

laps who kick and slap the evasive pool
in an ecstasy of ego and oblivion,
while their thin arms pivot with the frenzy
of lawn sprinklers in an August drought. No
time left for sleep or meditation,

not in the singing oceanic kingdom
of one lifetime nor in the false
aquarium of one summer weekend,
where water, air and body clash, where fish
circle the seas a thousand times a day.

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Two Poems by Andrew Gilligan

Lethe

Out where Lethe meets the sea, past the bend
in the long arm of water, where the waves
gesture casually at the beach, is rest.

There are no bolts to turn—no shovel breaks
the mortal soil; no sleep goes unslept. Dusk
is ever near, yet never rushed to come

here, as a buttonless coat is stubborn to close:
as honey flows, so flows the sun, and pushes
through a thick, patient sky. A boy lives here,

a barefoot, slippery one, light-bending boy,
a knotted vortex in the ether, a wheel.
He has his games. He's given names to every

leering tree, this stem of a leafy boy,
alone among the crowd in the quilted fold
of the wood, whose once-upon-a-slow-news day

is every day. His fields have gone to seed.
Despite the lack of bolts, he feels a wrench,
an itch he cannot reach. The magic ends.

So he flashes, smooth as snake through water, and goes—
as quicksilvery as days will someday seem
to have passed him by, bough, cradle and all

on their way to that place past the bend
of time, where the water gestures softly, whispers,
"Change me, change *me* to wine." And waits, suspended.

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For All Communicating Oceans

The number of mountain summits minus the number of passes plus the number of lakes plus one (for all communicating oceans) is two.
—Dr. Jung Rno, mathematician & physicist

I.

If he could throw his arms around the sun
(who does not pull any punches, brother)
then he would be, at last, the rainbow, strung
like beads across the halving sky, could hover

momentarily between the All
and his unfurling world until the light
withdrew as if it finally found its calling
somewhere, leaving him handfuls of night.

And mother Moon arise, console him, you
who more than any other suggest a hole
in the knotting sky, your pockmarked, damaged crown—

show that the patient, fonder heart imbues
its absence with a virtue: *Let go, let go,*
your pot of gold is empty. Come down.

II.

(moon)
Your pot of gold is empty. Come down,
you star of descending night, and look inside.

What did you think you'd find there? Seed you'd sown?
The water with which you credit Life? Or wine?

Maybe you can't see what's there—my light
is dim, I know, and I'm too wobbly a guide

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to be of much use, at too great a height
to pull *your* blood. I butt against the tides,

I who am so timid (you say) when face
to face with you, so bold when I'm away.

I'm reflective by nature, not creative,
but all the light I boomerang from there

to there I change within me: from roots through leaves
I drink from everywhere, or so it seems.

III.

(sea)
I drink from everywhere, and so, it seems,
do you, my friend—we make our milky ways
through soil or sky. And fluently we dream
of transformation, glaciers, vapor, days
when nothing tugs our strings. Before the thaw
we dreamed the same; when everything was night
my bulk moved moodwise, cutting deeps, and gnawed
the rock with sharper teeth. And then came light

in flood and torrent, crystal in disguise
as freedom, fickle as a god and twice
as blinding, dragged me to the air and rained
me down again, my rippling seaflesh baptized
in his shining blood: Destroyer of ice:
the Brightest, whom the flowers chase and praise.

IV.

(sun)
The Brightest, whom the flowers chase and praise,
I agree arise and see the knuckling
mountains, ranging as various spine, that maze

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of bone heat to which you raise your suckling
lips, swill its broth and glow the thronging
sparkle on the unlocked seamless sweep
of ocean all the palette's colors (maudlin
through bright the tear inside the rose that we
name *seed* a blaze that overcomes windows
the special tint and flush I use for shadows—

always stretching away as though I drive
the darkness from each form) every shard
of light which I expire and horizons carve
out from the heart of sky with trembling knives

V.

(glacier)
OUT from the heart of sky! With trembling ice
I lip you praise. Imagine: someday never
Comes, and when you've finally moved the mountain your
Time is up. Up. Away. The pearl escapes

Your shaking hand, escapes. So what remains,
O Daddy-O, so what? to rear and shatter
Like a wave and dissipate, elude the glazier's
Frames? —No. Still distances. *The signs say*

CAPE
OF GOOD LONG
HOPE THE GREAT
WHITE ICY
WAY

But the land lies pried apart. Scuttle me your
Warm waters finally smoothed the mountain's silver
Faces, echoes. Slow Tao of motion, stay—

You'll learn to tell your Hunger "I'm away,
I can't be reached." Or maybe, one fine day

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VI.

(the spirit wall)
I can't be reached. Or maybe, one fine day
you'll let go of your shadow's hand and step
into the light, the candle licking up
what's left outside the eyes, the Hollow. Erase

what's there. And as your vision slowly wanes,
a new one shivers into view: hear it gallop
around the dial, receiver of visions, it lumps
into your song. Move through this decay—

use radiation as your model, find
a stabler weight. Now, seven paces toward
the Infinite. Then pause. Next, turn a hard
about face and see those you've left behind:

the pail, puddles of spilled sunlight, and me:
the spirit wall who woos the infant sea.

VII.

(light)
The spirit wall that coos to the infant sea
at last would be within his reach,
and there, upon its shores, he'd see it merely

had stepped out of its own shadow; pearly
teardrops in his eyes, he'd search the heavens
and find within its caverns

his old friends the constellations,
and his old friends the constellations

would remind him that this sun, which warms us
through and

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through is part of someone else's constellation;
he'd seek out newer realms among the spectra

and finally comprehend—
I'd lead him up above the ruby oceans
if he could throw his arms around the sun.

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Three Poems by John Drury

Traveling with my Mother

I was sick, more or less, for the whole trip,
and so she got to know the pharmacists
of Venice, claiming it would help to sip
Coca-Colas in cafés, while mists

rolled in like squabbling cats. We squabbled too,
as I threw fits—and luggage—on a bridge,
groaning and arguing as her silence grew.
Which of us could bear the heavier grudge?

Like Proust's *maman*, she stayed in when I prowled
the alleyways at night, making a point
of waiting, lit up in the window, gold
and fractured as mosaics of a saint,

a saint who bitches, patroness of huffs.
We quibbled on the water-bus we rode
along the canyon of pink marble cliffs,
her cane tapping the boat's deck as we stood.

It's hard to translate the unhappiness
of others, even when you learn to spot
a parent's fluttering signals of distress:
all hostile flags at which I had to shoot.

Forgetting our quarrels, she calls the visit "grand."
I like remembering the day she sat
by a bridge, smiling from sky to tree to ground,
letting wind muss her hair, not smoking, quiet.

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Ghazal of the Lagoon

Morning, on the quay, there's a break in the light
rain here in the serene republic. I take in the light.

Every walker gets lucky at this gaming table,
where the gondoliers, like croupiers, rake in the light.

Through the glare of a restaurant's window, I see
fish glinting, like spear points that shake in the light.

I could sit on the edge and get wet forever,
all to consider a speed boat's wake in the light.

Furnaces burn. We sweat until we shine, fired up
by the wavy vases glassblowers make in the light.

Row me out, friars, in your *sandolo* on the waves
that glitter like ducats, for God's sake, in the light.

Burning the Aspern Papers

after a tale by Henry James

Miss Tina Bordereau has recently suggested to her lodger, a literary editor, that she would give him the letters written to her Aunt Juliana by the poet Jeffrey Aspern—if he married her. Before bolting from her house, he stammered, "Ah Miss Tina—ah Miss Tina . . . It wouldn't do, it wouldn't do!"

Tonight I spent a good while in the garden,
thinking about—well, sitting amongst the flowers
I love to see, and, when it grew too dark,
breathing in all the scents that blew, so cool
in the slight breeze, I pulled my favorite scarf
tighter around my throat. I wanted to stay

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as long as I could possibly enjoy it.
I had too much to think of, as you know,
and yet could not resolve what appeared settled.
I have, now, what remains around me here
and what I have retrieved from her sewn mattress,
the papers and effects that you desired—
but not too dearly. Still, I have earned much,
my keep alone, this garden and this house,
in gold she counted, one coin, drop, one coin,
drop in the glossy box. And the key's mine.
I've come into the kitchen, for it's been
my room, just as the parlor has been hers,
although it's larger here, and the high ceiling
takes what the firelight throws and muddies it
with shadows, or the shadowings of light,
a fluttering I always think is like
what water throws, reflected off canals.
And now, the papers. Bundled. Tied with ribbon.
And what's this? Fur? No, finer. Hair. But not
what I'd expect, a lock of brownish curls.
No, more a mess, a pitiful remembrance.
The fire is small, but surely it will do.
And he can help it grow, a bit of kindling
from hair as legendary as her eyes,
but not as frightening. Let me unfold
the first of these. Thin. Carefully creased. Aqua.

My dear Miss Juliana Bordereau—

Let us be sisters—though I am a man—
more intimate than lovers and more pure,
sharing our secrets here, more guessed at than
believed or known. Let gossip be our cure
when we fall ill with wistfulness of love.
For love shall pluck our tunes, and swell our breeze
when the sweet evening seasons with its clove
and whispers are the ripples of great seas.

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We'll both wear pantaloons, doff parasols
and stroll upon the Riva. Are you shocked
that we may waltz our way through the masked balls
with nothing from our open faces blocked?

Humor me, now, with sisterly affection,
pleased how long-standing is this fresh connection.

—Your most attentive servant, Jeffrey Aspern

Once I was fond of taking a promenade
on my great-aunt's arm, and my velvet hat
tried to fly off, but gracious, it was bound
by a red ribbon underneath my chin!
Why would he want a sister? Had he none?
You wouldn't talk so foolishly to me
if you could answer, looking up from reading.
I'd love to watch you reading silently
in this dark room. The paper isn't silent—
it catches at the edges, and I hold on
as long as I can, watch its flames, and drop it.

My dear Miss Juliana—

The Virgin Mary's so desirable
in Venice, baring her breast with a slight
smile and a full-eyed stare. I'd take the call
myself and worship at her shrine of light.

But yours will do, my saint of the canal.
No, not a saint, but living, like a sprig
with a sun's bloom, a burst below the wall
of a closed garden, wild, but not too big.

Is it your cloister I have floated by
in the black shell that creaks beside the walkway?
The blossoms, when I suck in, make me sigh.
What would we both, permitted, in our talk say?

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Pardon my manners. They are New World, crude
as proper savages who must go nude.

—Yours, J.A.

Heavens, I shouldn't want the Virgin naked!
But I have seen the pictures. Holy enough,
though I must wonder how the model stood it.
Certainly he was far more than direct.
Perhaps he teased her. But she never said.
And the green shade she wore to spare her eyes
was, I suppose, her mourning garb for him.
(You know it well now—dream of it, I'm sure.)
Yes, I am right to follow her instructions
and do what she would want. This correspondence
is hardly public. Too strange for strange eyes,
even yours, the strangest I have known.

Dear Juliana—

Custom is nothing but a bill of duties,
taxing to anyone who tries to smuggle
silk negligées from well-known harbor cities
or jewelry that would make a countess wiggle.

"It simply isn't done here." What a motto
to force on those whose freedom isn't sparing,
who love in stanzas, lavish rooms where sotto
voce *comes not from cautiousness but daring!*

Husbands are dull, like planters who have hired
farmhands to cultivate the land they own
but don't possess. Their wives are worse off, squired
by elderly associates through the town.

If secrets chose, what lady wouldn't take
her garden worked in nightly by a rake?

—Yours sincerely, Jeffrey

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If you were here, I'd now be silent,
watching the firelight on your eyes, as you
took in the words Aunt Juliana wanted
burned in the hearth. A heart that would not burn?
I can't remember when she said it. Often.
Oh, you would know. It's something you could edit,
like my life here. And we could burn them once
you'd copied them, or learned them all by heart,
and let me honor what I promised her—
or would the inky scratches matter more?
You were so generous, with all your money,
but she believed that it was merely greed
that could spend lavishly on drafty rooms.
I did speak up for you. And she approved,
as long as she would not be present then.
For she could not abide you, from the start,
except for my sake, and my future's sake.

My Juliana—

A husband marries that he might forget
the woman with his name—no problems of
"Now who the devil was the girl I met
in Dorsoduro?" (Learning by heart is love.)
He grumbles at domesticating claims
and goes off drinking in the nearest tavern,
where made-up women offer made-up names
and pleasure is the party picked to govern.

Learning by heart is love, and memory
is what I offer, not a ritual
of chores—obligatory, no days free—
fixed in a sampler on a parlor wall.

Remembering is all I ask of you
and all I promise. Do I vow? I do.

—Ever yours now, Jeffrey

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You know I can't think ill of you. I can't!
I like considering these papers ours,
our papers. We're in league together. Were.
Somehow the mirror's darker than the room
when I look up, away from all the glowing,
and doesn't catch the ripples from the fire.

My Juliana—

Getting lost is a solace of the blest,
a sweet prerogative, through turning lanes
and sudden bridges as I take the crest
and look out at dark water, darkened panes.

It matters little what had been my plans.
Though spoiled, they have been spared, and I can go
where I had not expected, over spans
that link the known world to what I don't know.

And so I chanced to meet you, with no thought
but bad transactions in my jostled head,
ripe for surprise, a burglar who is caught
napping within a house, in his own bed.

And so you met me on a mapless route
from nowhere, which I knew, and found me out.

—Always your own, Jeffrey

How slow it catches. But days go more slowly,
light and dark and light and hardly moving—
I rock in my embroidered chair, front, back,
the needlepoint my own, but the chair hers.
I like it better in this large, clean room.

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Juliana—

Many a pair at a masked ball
slip off their masks at Carnival
and dance upon the Grand Canal.

—May my boat call?

—Jeffrey

I'd rather dance, were I asked, in a great hall
lit by the torches lifted up by Moors,
painted or living, tall or stumpy as dwarfs.
I can remember flames upon the marble
glowing against the shine of many colors.
A light like this one, in the marble hearth
where usually a kettle hangs or meat
roasts on a spit, or used to, years ago.

My Juliana—

I wish you thought it practical to swim
instead of strolling. Granted, we would make
our way more slowly, aching in each limb,
than boats that would glide by and leave their wake.

We'd navigate like otters through the marsh
when the sun died, sputtering like a gas jet—
except we wouldn't have to dive for fish
and get ourselves entangled in a net.

We'd stroke and kick as others took a stroll
along the fondamenta, *tipped their hats*
or waved their fans to greet us. And we'd haul
ourselves up water steps, wet as drenched cats—

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but happy, drying soon enough to use
two seats in Florian's and read the news.

—Lovingly, your Jeffrey

I think I fluttered when you said "Miss Tina"
and I flushed then, I'm sure, for I could feel
the heat upon my cheeks. I couldn't think
a word. I couldn't find the proper one.
I couldn't recollect what others said
to a kind boarder's face. What did I say?
The words go by me, as they always have.

Sweet Juliana—

I like to think of legends happening here
in this wet place, where bodies must crowd near—
as Tristan, rising to his messages,
parts the gauze curtain, unsashes and says,
"My love, it is an agony of heaven
that here, by marble banks, we two are given
loving and leaving, dalliance and dying,
to learn to make love as we first learn lying."
Their innocence was part of their deceit—
as was their childish craving for the sweet.

And now I'm hungry too, for delicacies
that smell like your perfumes in the salt breeze,
and want to stuff myself— No, don't be coarse
and brush fine cheekbones raw and red, or worse.
The sweetest breeze is indoors, when you breathe,
your fingers through my hair my laurel wreath.

—Meet me again soon, Jeffrey

I too would be yours—and my belongings,
old longings, my long lease in this old place . . .

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I came here to be educated soundly,
and so with evenings, taking the Piazza,
the fans inside a hostess's salon,
and the smart talk, all the parties, dull plays
in brilliant theaters, full of the finest chatter.
How many hands took mine? Yes, just as many
released the gentle grip, it felt so feeble.
I turned away before I meant to turn—
as you, perhaps, did when you turned and left.
Aunt Juliana sneered. When Mr. Aspern
clasped her thin waist, she didn't flinch. And when
his lips met hers, I don't believe she shrank.
Ah, here it is. And just as I had fancied.

Juliana, loveliest—

Your lips, like bees upon the flowers, lit
on my own, delicate, though they could sting
when all the fragments of the lamplights flit
on the canal, breaking and gathering.

But you have emptied me. Sweetness is gone
from hours of staying up in solitude.
And I'm immobile, rooted, fixed upon
a balcony that passing boats have viewed.

But, really, life's not bad at this hotel,
although the bed is like a doge's barge.
I'd love to say I'm ailing, but I'm well
and never sleep on mattresses that large.

So, if I'm still your orchid, please be quick
to come again for gathering, and pick.

—Jeffrey, lowliest

Aunt Juliana's teaching me consisted
in what's withheld of human intercourse:

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the kinds of flowers, dress materials,
manners at table and the way to step
into a rocking boat, lifting my hem,
the authors it was proper to admire.
Her conduct—how could scandal threaten her?
She never did a bad thing in her life.

My Juliana, dearest one—

I prize the piercing of your eyes
as martyrs love the lance
pricking them clear to heaven.
Your glance
has hit direct and driven
my body so intensely that it dies.

But oddly, I remain, and you
look just as piercingly,
fixing me in your vision.
You see
with no hint of derision,
a look that feels as soft as cushions do.

—J.A., Ca' Giustinian

I know that look. Her eyes are terrible!
Were. Nothing penetrates, no, nothing burns
the way her disapproval felt. Not even
this fire I keep on feeding in the hearth,
half on the grate, half off. I poke it some.
You know that look. Your own was horrified
when she fell back, half dying, in my arms.
Your look, before you parted, was the same.
Discovery disgusts you? Yes, I see,
and now it's low. I'm running out of scraps.

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My patient Juliana—

You might imagine that I love to pose
and have my picture taken by a hand
with watercolors, proud of my fine nose
and steady as a schooner on dry land.

But my legs twitch, I feel an urge to go,
and meditation's better done alone,
in a cool room, than in a studio.
My fingers want to drum. I am not stone.

So, I confess, I'm restless to the core,
and, as you well know, only a miniature
is finished soon enough. Oils would mean more
hours to execute—and to endure.

But as the artist was your father, I
am glad I stilled my flesh—and let paints dry.

—Restless, Jeffrey

Relations! What was hers is now all mine,
and my possessions—I would be possessed
and you could have these documents. What's left.
We'd leave this drafty house, the smelly water
I let my hand drift down in—years ago,
or was it when your rower rowed us both
to the Piazza?—leave the damp and dank
and winds that gather up and make us cross
and ride a steamer to— The fire is lovely.
Nothing will keep you here, but I shall stay.

Dearest—

I cheerfully admit that I'm American
to all who meet me, only as the wary can,

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and introduce myself as Jeffrey Aspern.
Tell me, my love, what riches can my clasp earn?

—Yours

His Juliana hardly seems like mine,
but then she didn't love me, and I lived
year after year in the same residence.
Now you know her too. No, you'll never know.

My Juliana—

Now you're alarmed. And have you heard of others?
A countess here, a washerwoman there,
no matter if they're debutantes or mothers
with tattered rags or pearls in their coiffed hair?
Explaining pains the guiltless too. It bothers
my one love, you, and so let me declare
my soul is not my own. You must be liable
for what it does. It's yours. That's undeniable.

—Faithfully, your Jeffrey

Something happened between the two of them—
or everything, which I could not imagine
beyond these words, too saucy, too outré,
yet oddly like the prettiest of children.
When nothing happens, that too is a plot.
I always like the ingénue in plays
who stays as innocent and never changes,
except for how she's costumed, scene by scene.
I envy all the nuns in their black frocks
who walk, not stroll, along the lanes and bridges.
Where is my country? What is my religion?
You who could tell me tripped away with mutters,
and what you say in those late messages,
posted from the Veneto, seems the same

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as notices from an official bureau.
Nothing. Yet, certainly, I must prepare
to meet you when you call again, if only
to ask the porter to divest your rooms,
but at your pleasure, as the maid shall serve you.

Dearest Juliana—

I glimpse the future, and it isn't ours—
an arrow's arc that's plotted on a graph
but ends at its apex, shot from a tower's
archers at sport, piercing a bird in half.
Is that so bad? I'd play through our last hours
and fall in a canal, to make you laugh.

Time is what we've had, and now it seizes us
and wrenches us, in exile, from what pleases us.

—Ever, Jeffrey

And here's a scrap. Not even a salutation.

Critics who would dismiss me as Byronic
will never make me swear him off—my tonic!

If I have seemed coquettish, please forgive me
for feeling I, perhaps, was being wooed:
you sought me out so eagerly and lived
more dearly than this old house might deserve.

You love me—yes?—for what I am, and not
what critics say I should be. Well, the fact
is that I'm restless, fearful to be caught
like a snared parrot. Dearest, I have packed
my books and wardrobe. Leaving, love, means what?
My picture, like a traitorous doge's, blacked?

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(How serious, I wonder, would life's drama be
if we could not mix pathos into comedy?)

I miss the flowers you sent up to us,
though I would never press them, nor preserve them,
collecting what is only good when fresh—
unlike Aunt Juliana and her verses.
Well, perhaps they keep a little better,
I couldn't say. She didn't tell me either,
evenings when we sat and read. Could you?
She seldom spoke, in truth, of Mr. Aspern
but settled by the secretary, hushed,
or by the fireplace, leafing carefully.
I shall not read the lot to you, but some.

The dying sun has torched a path on water
in the great basin named after St. Mark.
And I must die away from you, no matter
that the flames glow until it's nearly dark.
Fire burns itself as well. The painter's daughter
now must picture every fluttering spark
and love its disappearing. Think with kindnesses,
my love, of our fire's rising, not my mindlessness.

Exits, to me, are new as entrances—
and just as temporary. Settling down
is but returning to my regular life,
different, of course, but not so different,
like one whose favorite chair has been restuffed.
I never need a word to know her words.
And she was kindest, even to you, in silence—
but you could not endure it. Like my talk.

J.—
I have to leave because I love too near—
at all's a bafflement—but, love, it's you
who shoo me to my wanderings from here

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to who knows where—home?—continents won't do
in satisfying what I've known but forfeit,
wishing I were motionless—yet I must leave—
a wedding coat, on me, would have a poor fit—
better a black armband on my coat sleeve.

If anybody seeks what I send you,
let them be thwarted—as we've been fulfilled,
immersed in one another, wet clear through—
be my executor. Spend what I've willed.

If anybody wants these scribbles, turn them
over to my favorite critic. Burn them.

—J.

Why does it matter so? Why do you seem
so eager to pursue the gentleman
as if he were a lady? Or you were.
It must be more than papers you pursued!
You wouldn't tell me, would you? No, you couldn't,
even though a word, a smile, a nod
would have resounded in my ears, and you
could have had your way, yes, but you turned then
and fled as if I'd dallied with your virtue.
I'll never understand, and yet I know.

Juliana—

If what we have, our brave love, now must finish,
let it go. Try to. It will not diminish.

—Jeffrey

My, what a heap of ash, the logs and sheets
mingling but different, now that they are powder.
My cheeks feel dry, but soft enough, at least

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to my own touch. Your boat may come tomorrow
or not, it doesn't matter, I must wait.
I shall stand—not here—out in the hallway,
and bid good-bye and wish you well and smile,
or try to, offering my hand to shake
(at least, for this time, one that won't be spurned),
and offer the assistance of my staff,
turning away, for this is now my future,
the legacy that Juliana's willed me—
not money that you paid in rent, your gold,
your hovering to meet me in the hall,
but this last look. I shall not say "Farewell."

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To George Plimpton
The Paris Review.

Dear George Plimpton,

You have asked me for a marked up manuscript page and for
a personal photograph.
I should like to send you these items but I cannot.
First of all, when I write, I write straight onto a typewriter,
(yes, this one), and when I correct, I correct onto a new page
and use the old one to light my study fire. I work in a hovel
at the bottom of our fields and the fire has to be lit.
I don't keep working drafts and anything I feel is unfit for
publication I burn. What would be the point of keeping it?

As to the photograph, neither I nor my partner own a camera.
We don't own a TV either, although we do have a few sheep.
Each to their own I say. The wonderful Jayne Wexler has just
taken some brand new photos of me that no-one has used before.
They were taken in my London house and you are welcome to them.
I am a great admirer of your journal and regret my own inadequacies.

Yours sincerely
Jeanette Winterson.

Advent 1997.

A letter from Winterson explaining why she has no manuscript pages.

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Jeanette Winterson

The Art of Fiction CL

"I cannot recall a time when I did not know I was special," writes Jeanette Winterson at the beginning of her fictionalized autobiography, Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit. *And, indeed, the facts of her life have supported that view. Born in Manchester in 1959, Winterson was adopted by Pentecostal evangelist Constance Brownrigg and her husband, John William Winterson, a factory worker. From her earliest years she was groomed by her mother and church to be a missionary, and her first forays into the world of letters were the sermons she began preaching at the age of eight. Her awareness of herself as different from others was heightened when she attended Accrington Girls' Grammar School, a place that her mother dubbed the "breeding ground" because it put young Jeanette in contact with the ordinary girls of the industrial Midlands,*

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who were more interested in embroidering platitudes on samplers than in saving souls at tent meetings.

At fifteen, Winterson had a love affair with a woman that was discovered and condemned by her church, leading to her expulsion from the community and to her leaving home to support herself. Working variously as an ice-cream van driver, a funeral parlor make-up artist and a domestic worker in a mental institution, she studied at Accrington College of Further Education and then went on to obtain her B.A. in English from St. Catherine's College at Oxford in 1981.

Between 1981 and 1987, Winterson worked at the Roundhouse Theatre in London and then in publishing. During that time she wrote her first book, Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit *(1985), a semi-autobiographical account of coming of age as a lesbian and a writer, interwoven with elements of the mythical and the fantastic.* Oranges *earned her the Whitbread Award for a first novel, and in 1990, when Winterson adapted it for television, the series won a number of international awards, including* BAFTA *Best Drama and the Prix Italia. In 1985, she also published* Boating for Beginners, *a light revisionist romp through the Book of Genesis that she now categorizes as a "comic book."*

In 1987, with the publication of The Passion, *Winterson began to support herself as a full-time writer.* The Passion, *an intricate tale, loosely set in the Napoleonic era, garnered the John Llewelyn Rhys Memorial Prize. The reiterated phrase of Henri, one of the two narrators, crystallizes Winterson's vision of the indissolubility of fact and fiction: "I'm telling you stories. Trust me."*

Sexing the Cherry *(1989), with its time-transcending characters and fairy-tale magic, won the E.M. Forster Award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters.* Written on the Body *(1992) challenged readers' traditional assumptions about gender and identity by refusing to categorize the narrator as male or female.*

Winterson's experimentalism as a novelist has continued in Art and Lies *(1994) and, most recently, in* Gut Symmetries *(1997). In 1995, she published* Art Objects, *a collection*

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of essays—part art criticism, part manifesto—in which she applauds risk-taking as a measure of greatness: "The riskiness of Art, the reason why it affects us, is not the riskiness of its subject matter, it is the risk of creating a new way of seeing, a new way of thinking." According to Winterson, "The rebellion of art is a daily rebellion against the state of living death routinely called real life."

This interview took place on a brisk autumn London day in an editor's office at Granta. *Over the course of several hours, Winterson responded to questions with unflagging intensity and polish. Her speaking presence conveys the kind of quiet magnetism that would no doubt have led to spectacular conversions had she pursued a missionary path.*

INTERVIEWER

Why did you leave London?

JEANETTE WINTERSON

I didn't want to live there anymore. It became untenable for me in all sorts of ways. After having two very bad experiences with the press, both with *Written on the Body* and *Art and Lies*, I just didn't want to be in the fishbowl. I thought, I want to get away from here because it's not going to do me or my work any good to stay. So I went and hid myself in the woods.

But that doesn't mean that I don't have a very powerful relationship with this city. I have just bought myself a mad, derelict, fallen-down Georgian house in one of the older parts of London, because I need to return here, and, like Dickens, I love to walk the streets in the night and see what is happening, see what's going on. So in me there is that tension between needing the space and peace and also wanting to be where humanity is concentrated at its worst and its best.

INTERVIEWER

What happened with the press to make you feel so exposed in London? Did it have to do with reviewers?

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WINTERSON

I don't read reviews. I stopped reading them after *Sexing the Cherry* because I thought there was really no point. I don't have to sit down and listen to these ravings or even these praises, because there are very few people actually reviewing now whose authority I respect or who I think have got anything to say. I take the Ezra Pound view that you shouldn't take any notice at all of anybody who has not written a significant work themselves. Then, what they have got to say is worthwhile whether you like it or not. If they haven't, it isn't. So that's my view. And I stick with it. But at the time I got fed up with being continually thrashed to bits and having my personal life exposed in ways that were vicious and designed to destroy. I thought, I don't have to stand here any longer, I can go. Which I did. That made me feel a lot better.

INTERVIEWER

Do you see yourself as a recluse now?

WINTERSON

Well, I always was, which is a bit bizarre living in London, because I never go anywhere except silently, secretly, by myself. I like to go up and down anonymously. I don't like to be known or recognized, and so living in London was a little bit absurd. I wanted it for the culture. My house was very conspicuous, and there was at one time a lot of envy: who is she and why should she have it? And there was a notorious made-up interview where someone pretended they had been in my house, and in fact they had just been looking through the window. I can't live with that! So I decided that I didn't want to be looked at any longer.

Now I have my little house hidden away in the woods, and a little house here, which I am rebuilding, and I shall come and go secretly between the two and that will suit me very well.

INTERVIEWER

It's not surprising that you want to retain some contact with London since cities play such an important role in your works.

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WINTERSON

I am interested in the tension between the built environment and the natural environment and how the two can coexist, given that they have to coexist, and how at the moment our dreams of bliss are a kind of invented Arcadia. Everyone wants to escape to the hills and leave behind the swarming cities, which are disease and crime. Clearly, this is just as crazy as everyone wanting to leave the hills and rush to the cities to get jobs. It's as though people are always uneasy in the place where they are and think that the extreme alternative will provide the solutions. But we know that there aren't any. I like to focus on the nightmare city so people don't become too used to it, too happy to live with it.

INTERVIEWER

Do you take part at all in a community of writers?

WINTERSON

I am more on my own. Obviously I know writers. Kathy Acker is a very close friend. But I'm not clubbable, you see. I don't like literary parties and literary gatherings and literary identities. I'd hate to join anything, however loosely. Remember, I come at it from the outside in every sense because, whatever people say, working-class women don't get on in this job. If they do, where are they? People come at me with a very middle-class consciousness. They look at me and they think, Well she went to Oxford, she has obviously done all right. So they put me in their own pigeon holes. But they can't understand what it means to come from a house with no books and no bathroom and your father a factory worker, not being in school much because you're traveling around in a gospel tent. No encouragement and no education, because it's not important, especially not for girls, and having to choose to leave home in order to carry on. And not getting any money to go to university with, and having to work all the way through. I mean, people do that now, but they didn't when I was there. So, there was nothing anticipated about me or

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for me. What I did was unusual. That's why, I think, from the start I felt on the outside, and to a large extent, I have remained so. I wouldn't change that because I think my temperament and my character are pretty solitary; I view with suspicion any insider activities. I suppose I am a bit of an anarchist at heart.

INTERVIEWER

In spite of your emphasis on your own working-class roots, your books are not particularly marked by class.

WINTERSON

No, they're not. I'm not interested in it. I know it exists, and I know what I am, and I know that to some extent that never changes. I think if you're British you view the class system perhaps rather differently than if you are not. Because you have always known it. It's not that it isn't a problem, it's not that it isn't something that I want to deal with, but it is not something that is useful to me in my fiction. It's why I use an archetype. My characters all have something of the hero archetype about them in that they are largely stripped of context. But they offer a kind of operatic salvation, for themselves and for the reader in that through their lives one's own struggles can be experienced without being overly definitive, without pinning them down too much, which I wouldn't want to do. And obviously I have been able to escape that by setting something in an imagined past or in an imagined present, tinkering with place and time so that the reader can't quite say, Oh yes, I know where this is, I can identify here. I want them rather to identify with a being, with a state of consciousness, with a particular kind of imaginative value rather than some sort of TV character.

INTERVIEWER

From the outset of your career, you've had trouble with readers trying to pin things down on a more concrete level. After the publication of *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* you

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were caught in a backlash of people trying to delve into your personal life, to assess the extent of its autobiographical content in spite of comments within the work itself about the impossibility of separating fiction from fact.

WINTERSON

Oh, I'll never escape from that, will I? I think I spent the best part of ten years saying, "This is not autobiography in the way that you understand it. It is simply a way of using raw material . . . because one always uses raw material from one's own life." There is as much of me in *Sexing the Cherry* as there is in *Oranges*. It is simply the way that I disguise and translate the direct experience and, I hope, make it rather more permanent than it would be otherwise. Writers always put themselves into their work, constantly. But you can't just untangle it and take it back to its source. It's not simple. In *Art and Lies*, I say something about how you can't reconstruct the bunch of grapes from the bottle of wine. They are not the same in the last analysis nor would one want them to be. So I do try to keep these strict definitions . . . because I know that the whole push at the moment of saying that this is about a writer's life is a way of minimizing the work and trying to make it controllable, handleable. It is to say, "Well, this isn't really art, whatever art is," (not that they have any idea) "but it is about experience." I get rather tired of that. What matters is what writers do with the experience, whatever the experience is. Now whether it took place in my imagination or in my psyche or whether it took place in my physical body, do we really have to split hairs like that?

INTERVIEWER

Since there are autobiographical elements in *Oranges* that involve other people, there were, no doubt, readers who did care about whether or not you were making things up. What did your mother think of the book?

WINTERSON

She did read it. That was the last letter I got from her. She wrote rather bitterly that it was the only time she had ever

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had to order a book in a false name—that was clearly the big problem. Of course, she was deeply angry. Interestingly, she was angry for the right reasons. She kept saying, "But this isn't true, it didn't happen like that." I'd say, "No, that's right, you should become a reviewer for the national press." Autobiography reverses the positions because normally it's parents who tell children the stories, not children who tell the story to their parents.

INTERVIEWER

Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit does celebrate the triumph of the protagonist over the narrow-mindedness of her community. Her ability to imagine a way out is a decisive factor in her success. To what extent has the imagination helped you to overcome obstacles in your life?

WINTERSON

It has been a bridge for me away from a particular background, but I suppose the preliminary to that was education, because I put all my faith in that. I thought, If I can get out of here, get myself to Oxford, get myself educated, things will be better. Which is very much a *Jude the Obscure* dream. And it's equivocal, of course. You do it and then you realize that it wasn't at all what you thought.

It was actually books that started to make those pockets of freedom, which I hadn't otherwise experienced. I do see them as talismans, as sacred objects. I see them as something that will protect me, I suppose, that will save me from things that I feel are threatening. I still think that; it doesn't change. It doesn't change, having money, being successful. So from the very first, if I was hurt in some way, then I would take a book—which was very difficult for me to buy when I was little—and I would go up into the hills, and that is how I would assuage my hurt. That is still the case, for me. Whatever has happened to me, if it is difficult for me to deal with, or if I cannot deal with it at all, then I'll take a book, probably something like *Four Quartets*, and go out on my own—I would much rather

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do that than talk to anyone—and read it, and it becomes a salve, an ointment in a very real way. To me, the words are things, living things. For me they work far more potently than any other method and, I dare say, that will go on until I die.

INTERVIEWER

When did you start to write?

WINTERSON

I always wrote sermons, but I'm not sure that really counts. I didn't write any fiction or anything that you would call *creative writing* (to use a term I loathe beyond measure) until I sat down to write *Oranges*. That was a journey for me, an investigation. One whose results were unpredictable. I didn't know that I was writing a book that would be published, I just knew that I was following a particular line of energy, which had to be followed, and at the end of it, there really was a book, which was something of a surprise to me.

INTERVIEWER

Did writing sermons as a child and having direct contact with an immediate audience affect your later fiction-writing?

WINTERSON

Writing sermons is very good discipline because you have a limited amount of time and a chosen subject, and you have to convince your audience. And if you fail, you fail: I mean, you can see you've failed by looking out at them. So it teaches you a particular economy of style. It not only teaches you tricks of the trade, of ordinary rhetoric and how to use language for a very specific purpose to make sure that you are saying exactly what you want to say, but also to use images and symbols. One of the good things, I think, about the Christian faith is that it draws on such a wealth of images and symbols, which even the least church-minded of us still recognizes. We are two thousand years of Western Christianity. That's in our body and our blood, which is partly why the symbolism of the East,

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although it expresses the same truths just as well, doesn't work for us quite as it ought to. You have to have your own symbols and myths to express your collective past. That's why I am a bit dubious about ransacking the East, as we're so fond of doing at the moment, because there is something rather desperate and also rather faddish in it, as though we feel that we've made redundant all our own pictures and metaphors, which is simply not true. They still have that depth charge; I think it is a question of writers using them.

INTERVIEWER

You have said that you see yourself as an evangelist for the word.

WINTERSON

Yes, I suppose once an evangelist, always an evangelist. We have to be careful of the word *evangelical*. I think it can have positive value, but for most people it means something that is intrusive and low-minded and bigoted. Not that I have a particular doctrine, something narrow and confined that I want to get across, but what one has to be careful of, of course, is not becoming too dogmatic or too soapboxy in the approach. I do have a very vigorous attitude to life and I want to change things. That is my character. I don't know whether I was drawn into those kinds of church processes because I have this kind of character or whether those processes formed my character. Who knows? But I like energy. I like to see people who are committed to something and are prepared to go out and say, "Look, this really matters to me and maybe it would matter to you; maybe it would make a difference." For me it's art, particularly words, particularly language. I suppose if I pursue it with the same kind of enthusiasm with which I once stood up and spoke for God, people will have to forgive me . . .

INTERVIEWER

At the end of *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*, the narrator tells us that she could have been a priest, but she is going to

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be a prophet instead. This change in vocation seems to be connected to her evolution into a writer. Do you see the connection between your own upbringing and your writing as being one of translating the evangelical spirit into art?

WINTERSON

What I really want to do is to persuade people to experience for themselves what I believe to be present in art, which is this extraordinary releasing power. I suppose where the great divide comes between true evangelicals and what I do is that I want to hand the process entirely over to the individual and say, "There's no book, there are no rules. You must find it for yourself." But I hope it will be invigorating, and I hope it will be empowering.

INTERVIEWER

One continuing legacy from your training as a missionary is a close relation to the Bible. Do you see the Bible as a foundational text?

WINTERSON

It is for us in the West, yes. I sometimes wonder about the younger generation, but I still feel that everyone knows a few Bible stories and knows about the central Christian myth of miraculous birth, the life, the Crucifixion, the Resurrection. I think you could ask anyone and they would have some idea what you were saying. And therefore from that you can construct a kind of central archetype around which our ideas are formed. The stories all say the same thing. Every country has a hero narrative, which always begins with the strange and miraculous birth of a child who is threatened, and then the person grows to adulthood and does extraordinary deeds and then is usually killed by their enemies, but nevertheless has an effect on consciousness that is profound. Those stories are everywhere. Just as when you look at the human body and there are certain overriding physical characteristics that we all share, whether here or in deepest Africa, so in the unconscious,

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in the subconscious, there are elements of myth which remain the same across peoples.

INTERVIEWER

In *Oranges* you engaged in revising the Bible or revising aspects of the Bible, but in *Gut Symmetries* you appear to accept the Bible as part of a larger tradition. Has your view of the Bible changed?

WINTERSON

I don't think my journey is an untypical one in that if you have been immersed in something, there will come a point when you have to rebel against it. It was necessary for me to leave behind my entire early background—physically, emotionally and intellectually . . . to have nothing to do with it. *Oranges* was a way of cleansing myself from all that, of saying, "No, this is what I am. Not this other thing, this made thing. Now I am going to make myself, I'll be self-invented." Over the years—since I wrote *Oranges* eleven years ago—I have continued to think long and deeply about those issues that I suppose I have thought about since I was a very small child. Now I feel comfortable again to use the Bible as one source book amongst many others, but as a very important one. It is something that I know so very well that it would be ridiculous for me to try to do without it. And there's no point. I don't accept the God myth of the church. I think it's hogwash. But that doesn't mean that I don't accept the essential mystery of the Scriptures and of the religious faith.

INTERVIEWER

But you don't feel the need to fight against it at this point?

WINTERSON

Absolutely not. It's of much more use to me as an ally. But that's only because of this relationship whereby it was everything, then it had to be nothing, and now I have come back to a point where it is as though a friend walks beside you, neither in front nor behind.

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INTERVIEWER

Does the Bible have, then, the status of other texts that inhabit your work and your life?

WINTERSON

Yes, very much so. I like to know a lot of stories and myths. That is extremely important to me. It helps me think about things, it helps me piece things together. It makes a bridge. I think it's one of the ways human beings have always understood their environment and the challenges that environment has posed.

INTERVIEWER

In your earlier works you play around with myths and fairy tales, revising them and making new ones. Is this a way of offering up new plots for people to think about?

WINTERSON

Yes. A lot of people knew these stories somewhere, or a version of them. It's a question of coaxing these stories back into conscious memory from where they have been lost. I think I have spoken before about the writer, the artist being a kind of dredging net going down into the rich silt of the mind, of the spirit, to bring up things that are normally out of reach or not accessible to consciousness. It's the duty of the writer—and indeed of all artists—to think long and deeply and to be able to drill down into those substrata so that these contents are released. Also, I think that as you drill down there is a release in all of the senses because great pressures build up in people and they don't know why. Quite often something very simple, a way of elucidating it, a way of telling the story, can release that and relieve it and make them feel, Yes, that's what is happening to me, or, This is how I feel. Then immediately one is taken off that horrible little rock of chaos where one is entirely alone and brought back into the community.

INTERVIEWER

In your writing, you forge ties with the people who are your friends in the realm of letters—Virginia Woolf, T.S. Eliot,

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William Blake and others—by alluding to them, quoting them, playing around with their words in your text. Do you see that as a tribute or as the inevitable result of your life as a reader?

WINTERSON

I think it's both. I have a very good memory. Being brought up without books, it was perhaps more urgently necessary to memorize things than it is for most people. I'd also been brought up to memorize large chunks of the Bible. So I know just stacks and stacks of stuff by heart, which I continually mutter to myself as I go about my business. I shall probably turn into some frightful old woman who mutters all the time. I think I am already. It's a lifeline to me; it's a kind of rosary, isn't it, these chants of mine? They're full of sacred text, and so naturally they occur in my work. It's simply that they do, in so much as I think about them while I'm writing, and I think, Yes, that fits. It then suggests an allusion, which the reader can gather or not, according to what they bring to the book. The more I can stuff in it, the more layers there are in my work, the more there is for people to mine.

INTERVIEWER

You've written, "I cannot do my own work without known work." Do you have any sort of program for yourself, certain texts that you immerse yourself in, in order to write, or is it less structured than that for you?

WINTERSON

It's both. Obviously I'm rather a great troller of secondhand bookshops. Fortunately, I live near Oxford, a very good place to search for secondhand books. I like fishing about, seeing what I can find. Which has always seemed to me part of the sinister side of the computer revolution. Because there will be no more fishing. A terrible way of confiscating knowledge, these computer indexes. That really worries me. I like to crawl around secondhand bookshops, and indeed libraries, and just

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see what's there. So there's that part of it that is haphazard. Except, strangely enough, when I am about to write a book, I always find exactly what I want as if by chance. But it isn't chance, it's one of those synchronicities. Otherwise, I'll choose something that I want to read, and I'll read it a lot. A couple of winters ago I wanted to read all of Shakespeare again. So I thought, Right, that's what I'll do from October to March and it will be something I do every day. At the moment, I'm on the last eight volumes of the collected works of Jung, because I did the other nine last winter.

INTERVIEWER

Book collecting is something that you have said you did even when you didn't have the resources for it. Are you able to indulge in this passion more freely now?

WINTERSON

Yes. I did an interview for CBC on the radio, and the chap interviewing me asked me what was the most I'd ever spent on a first edition. I said that I never spent more than three thousand pounds, and he nearly fainted. He said, "Well, that is like six thousand Canadian dollars!" That really horrified him. "Why would anybody in their right mind . . . ?" And I said, "Look, people spend that on a holiday to Barbados. People spend that on a fancy piece of hi-fi equipment or a new computer. God help us, people spend that on a dress." I could go to Donna Karan in Knightsbridge and I could spend that. Nobody would find that particularly surprising. But they do find it surprising when I say that I've spent that on a book. But, to me, it's not. It's lovely to be able to do that. It's a great thrill, and I don't think I shall ever tire of it . . . to be able to buy things that come up in catalogs which then go into my own little sanctuary.

INTERVIEWER

In *Art and Lies* you deal with the book as artifact, as a kind of bearer of history in and of itself. Is that one of your

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fascinations—books as having passed through various hands and times?

WINTERSON

Yes. I love that. I love to think about the secret life of the book and where it's been and who's had it. The associations there are very compelling. Also, the period I collect, which is modernism, 1900 to 1940, is a nostalgic period because it's probably the last great period of the book as we shall know it, in so much as books were still being very well produced, often on rag paper with extremely interesting people doing the covers, some making beautiful things. But now that only happens in a way that is extremely self-conscious—specialist private press editions that are aimed at the collector. They're not aimed at me, I don't want to collect anything that is made for collecting. What a world we are! That you have things that you can collect like that!

A great friend of mine, who was one of the most important collectors in Britain, died recently. His collection has now been broken up, as he wished: "These books must now go back into the market to become part of someone else's collection." So, rather than left to the Bodleian—and we are talking about millions of pounds worth of books—it's the most wonderful thing that they have gone back. There is a kind of rightness to that, isn't there? It's rather like Excalibur being dragged back into the lake. I think I'll do that too, so they will appear again. Which is rather nice, so one only has them for a time.

INTERVIEWER

How do you see your own books as artifacts? Do you take an active part in designing their appearance?

WINTERSON

I think the time I like best, in a lazy kind of way, is in between finishing the book and publishing it, because you've done all the work that you can, and you know that it's gone

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to a good home. I like getting on with the nuts and bolts of the book after that. How are we going to make it look beautiful? How are we going to sell it, and how can we use it as an image tool? Those things interest me. I am not the kind of writer who simply puts the final post off and then says I don't want to know anything else about what happens. I used to be in publishing, and that side of life is still one that I like to be involved with and work closely with.

I would hate to see books and publishing become shabby second cousins to the rest of the media. There is a bit of a danger that books and publishers and perhaps even writers will take the view that it doesn't matter what our product looks like because we'll have readers anyway. It's a very defensive attitude: No, we mustn't go out and make new readers; people who buy CDs or videos or go to movies don't normally read. There's an attitude that says if you don't like reading, if you don't love books, you never will, so we don't have to care about that. I care about that very much. I think you have to build bridges and help people simply to open the book and start reading it. Because as soon as they do that you are fifty percent there.

INTERVIEWER

You've written elsewhere about the need for people to raise themselves to the level of art, rather than art bringing itself down to the level of people.

WINTERSON

That's definitely what I feel. But I feel you can help people, perhaps people who are a bit nervous of books. The word still has power even in the multimedia age, and people who are not used to the word can be a bit scared by it, especially if they haven't had a particular kind of education; they feel that books are somehow not for them because they didn't grow up with them. You have to help them to feel that a book is not going to explode in their face, and that's where packaging and image and really clever publishing can help. There is nothing wrong with that, nothing to be ashamed of.

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INTERVIEWER

For whom do you write?

WINTERSON

I don't ever think of it. I simply do the work that I need to do without imagining an audience at all. I am always surprised when I do meet readers or when I do public appearances, where I see people from all walks of life, a great cross section, a great variety. One of my personal aims has been to try to bring the word back to people who are dispossessed of it. So when people come along and say, "I don't normally read, but somebody gave me one of your books and now I have read all of them," that, for me, is a great victory. Because, of course, they won't stop with my books; they'll read other people's too.

INTERVIEWER

So you hope in some way to transform people's lives through your writing?

WINTERSON

Very much so, yes. It's not that I set out with that in mind. I never sit down and think that now I want to write something with a high moral tone or with a particular seriousness or a relevancy to today's gender issues. I never think like that. It's rather more a smuggling, a kind of contraband, wanting to get something across frontiers, places where it's not normally allowed.

I think people are often quite unaware of their inner selves, their other selves, their imaginative selves, the selves that aren't on show in the world. It's something you grow out of from childhood onwards, losing possession of yourself, really. I think literature is one of the best ways back into that. You are hypnotized as soon as you get into a book that particularly works for you, whether it's fiction or a poem. You find that your defenses drop, and as soon as that happens, an imaginative reality can take over because you are no longer censoring

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your own perceptions, your own awareness of the world. Most of us spend a lot of time censoring everything that we see and hear. Does it fit with our world picture? And if it doesn't, how can we shut it out, how can we ignore it, how can we challenge it? We are continually threatened in life, it's true. But once you are alone with a book, and it's also true with a picture or with music, all those defenses drop and you can enter into a quite different space where you will learn to feel differently about yourself.

INTERVIEWER

There was a time when you were writing and working to support yourself, and now the writing supports you. How have things been different for you since you've been writing full time?

WINTERSON

It has been a long time; I have been doing it since 1987. When I sold *The Passion* here, I decided that I would just live on the money. My needs are fairly simple. Of course, one just spends as much money as one has. Very peculiar that! You never actually *have* any money. You think, If I had this much money ten years ago, I would have thought I was amazingly rich, but I still manage to spend it all and not have any left. At the moment, speaking purely financially, I get a good price in the marketplace. I am published in a lot of countries, so I do well. But I don't imagine and I can't expect that will always be the case. A writer's life is very much a high-wire act, especially with huge changes of market forces now—whether there are going to be any books at all and what it will be like in twenty years. So I think that's why it's very important simply to care about the work and to do the best work you can, and not to worry about the market or the audience or any of those considerations.

INTERVIEWER

Do you have more freedom now than you did before in terms of editors and publishers accepting your experimental style?

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WINTERSON

Well, if my books didn't sell, I wouldn't be published. That's for sure. I have always had a very personal relationship with the people who publish me. Frances Coady, now at *Granta*, published me at Random House. I have had to move quite a bit, but I think that is because my own career coincided with the strange phenomenon in the eighties when publishing houses kept being bought and sold. So I have had to move around, much more than is usual. That's been a bit strange. But I think I can pretty much do what I want now. I do it anyway, you know, and I'm not bothered. If they won't pay me, they won't pay me. I'm still doing it.

INTERVIEWER

You have alluded to a dislike for the computer age, and you also mentioned that you have a fondness for your typewriter. Does this mean that you don't use a word processor?

WINTERSON

Yes. It does mean that. I don't. I love my typewriter. It's electric, of course, but it's one of those wonderful old-fashioned models that never, never break down. It'll just go on forever. I have written everything on it since *The Passion*. It's a friend of mine. I know all its little ways, and I wouldn't want anything else.

I like the physicality of the piece of paper. I like cutting up my bits of paper if I want to change it around. I am very messy in that respect. My original manuscript of *Gut Symmetries* has all the corners cut off because I had to repaginate it. I thought, What is the quickest way of doing it? So I just cut all the corners off and then photocopied it and redid the photocopies, so mine has got these stupid triangles. But I like that. It's my manuscript. I can do what I want with it. I don't care what it looks like, as opposed to that kind of self-publishing, where people hand in these amazing word-processed things and you just think, Well, that looks very nice, but . . .

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INTERVIEWER

Do you compose at the typewriter?

WINTERSON

Yes, straight on the typewriter. I don't like doing it any other way. I don't even like doing it with pen and paper. I will if I have to. But I tend not to at all.

INTERVIEWER

How do your books come to you? Do you think first of a character?

WINTERSON

Well, every book has been different. Each touching-off point tends to come as a surprise and is unlooked for. I have a pact with myself about my work: I simply go to my study every day and wait. I read, I write things, but when I'm not writing a book, I don't necessarily expect anything to happen. But I still go there. It seems to create the necessary psychic space and also the necessary tension out of which something will be formed. With *Gut Symmetries* it took an awfully long time. The book collapsed on me three times. I had to throw away three drafts well into two thirds, because I hadn't quite got to the point where I could actually write it. You really have to have faith then—and it *is* a question of faith—and you do have to believe, because there is no other way. There is nothing objective about this. It is faith and it is belief. There is nothing to say that because you have covered pages in the past that you will cover them in the future. Or that they will be any good. There are no guarantees. But I had some idea of the characters, and I knew what I wanted to deal with in terms of physics and what that might say. It was a question of finding a structure that would be in fact simple enough to hold some very complex material and direct enough to get across things that are very elusive. I needed to set up a contrast, so that the form and the material could be best presented without either getting tangled in the other. That was in fact extraordinarily difficult to do.

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INTERVIEWER

Once you had the structure, did the book come quickly, or was it still an uphill climb?

WINTERSON

When it's written, of course, it could never have been written any other way. You just think, What was all the fuss about? Yes, it *was* difficult. It's like stoking a fire. To start with you must tend it very carefully; it won't burn anything you throw on it. By the time it's a big blaze you can chuck old tires and sofas on it and it will burn. But to start with, that will just put it out. I kept putting out my fire by throwing on too much unwieldy, unsuitable material before it was blazing; then I would have to start the whole thing painfully again with little twigs and bits of paper, and nurse it and make it go until I got to that point where I thought, Right, I'll just chuck the lot on there and it will be incandescent.

INTERVIEWER

In your own works, do you see philosophy as driving the plots, or are philosophy and plot so interconnected that it's hard to separate them?

WINTERSON

It's really to do with thinking. Sometimes I look at my work, and I think, Oh God, my characters don't do anything except think! But that is what I do. I have to think about things constantly, ceaselessly. So that leads to abstract speculation, but always I hope to pull it through some very concrete experiences. I like to think that my work is tangible, something that you can touch, taste, smell, feel. I wouldn't want to become so lost in philosophizing or abstractions that it didn't have any relevance anymore, which again is why I try to use stories in particular ways to concretize the image . . . to express it in terms such that people will feel it is alive with color rather than an abstract thought. I myself don't really need things concretized, but that's the way I want to pass things on. I

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love abstract paintings, and I find pictures of things rather distressing. That's not because I despise them, or that they are less than the sort of stuff I like; it's simply what feeds you, what works for you in a particular way. I like to look at harmonies of color or sound or language in a way quite separate from their meaning, that is, their superficial meaning.

INTERVIEWER

This goes along with your dislike of realism?

WINTERSON

I dislike it simply because the narrative function of the novel has been overtaken and done much better now by television and cinema. For instance, when photography was invented, a great many painters thought that they would be out of a job, and a great many of them were. But not painters like Picasso, who rejoiced in photography and took a lot of pictures himself, who thought that this would lead to a new freedom for painters because they would no longer have to represent what was there. Instead, they could paint much more subjectively and, as he thought, more honestly. They would no longer be bound to the narrative of fact. Now I can't see why for us as writers it shouldn't be the same thing. If television and cinema can mop up that need for narrative drive, for life as it is lived, for a picture of the everyday, then great! Let it. Because it is a function and people need it, that should free up words into something far more poetic, something about the inner life, the imaginative life . . .

INTERVIEWER

You have criticized contemporary writing for being too focused on narrative, and you even say that you don't write "novels." Do you believe that the novel as a genre is dead?

WINTERSON

Yes, I do think so, because *novel* is a historical word from a historical period. The novel is a nineteenth-century construct,

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and I don't see what place it has now on the borders of the twenty-first. I prefer to talk about *fiction* because, to me, the novel means something very specific, and comes out of a particular nineteenth-century sensibility. I love those books and wouldn't want to be without them; I wouldn't want anybody not to read them. I shall have my little goddaughter on Dickens as soon as I ever can. But it's this business of reproduction furniture. You cannot keep producing the things that have been successful in the past or that have expressed the human condition in the past. You have to move forward; you have to make it new for every couple of generations, because otherwise it is not a living thing anymore. Books shouldn't be printed television, they should be something in their own right.

INTERVIEWER

You express a kind of self-consciousness about the novel as a genre, which hearkens back to the eighteenth century, a period in which novelists were very self-conscious about the newness of the form.

WINTERSON

Yes. In fact, the eighteenth century is a century of which I am particularly fond. I have a Georgian house, I like things eighteenth century. I like that sense of liberty and anarchy along with mathematical preciseness and civility and ridiculously artificial manners. I like the self-consciousness of the century, which I feel disappears in the nineteenth century into a kind of debased moralizing, where self-consciousness becomes self-righteousness. You can see it in the art, you can see it in the social constructs. I think of the apotheosis of the novel as a nineteenth-century phenomenon, and something which was not present in that particular form in the eighteenth century or again by the early twentieth. It seems to me to be something that belongs to a particular period, and should be understood in its period. I wouldn't call *Orlando* a novel—and neither did Virginia Woolf—and I don't mean that's be-

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cause she called it a biography. I mean it simply isn't. It in no way resembles a nineteenth-century product; it's closer, if anything, to an eighteenth-century piece. So it's really about trying to use words precisely so that we know what we are talking about, rather than saying that I hate novels. I don't. But I want to know what it is we're writing now, and I don't see that they are novels. Or they shouldn't be.

INTERVIEWER

If moving beyond the concept of the novel allows you greater scope for creating a more authentic form, how do you proceed to do this? Does the form of a work develop organically or is it something that you impose on the work from outside?

WINTERSON

I think the two things come together. Just as if you were painting a picture, you would want to use particular colors depending on your subject matter, depending on what emotional intensity you wanted to express. So it is with the written work—the form must somehow be created organically from within, not so much the content, but the mood that you want to create.

I suppose sometimes you're really lucky and you hit something that works together beautifully, and then other times you have literally to make it up as you go along. You say, "What can I try now? Will this work, will that work? Can anybody help me?" And that's when you go back desperately to your private ancestors to see how they've solved a particular problem. There is a whole technical side about what you need to know in order to write well—which is continually overlooked, though never overlooked when people talk about pictures and music. Unless you are absolutely and thoroughly soaked in English language and literature (if you are writing in English), you will never know what you need to know. The funny thing about creative-writing courses is that they busily rush around teaching people how to express their banalities without teaching them how to source the things that they

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need to discover. If you go and study music or painting, you learn about the past. You learn where to look, you learn what to look at, how to look things up. You need creative-*reading* courses not creative-writing courses. Then people would have something that they could actually use in a positive way instead of rushing in thinking, How can I express myself?

INTERVIEWER

In *Art and Lies*, you write, "It is right to question standards but wrong to assume that there aren't any." Where do the standards come from?

WINTERSON

You have to choose the best of the past—and the standards are very high in the English language—and ask yourself, "Where do I figure in this, do I come anywhere near it?" If not, you may as well stop. If you really think that you are nowhere compared with the people you admire—and that has to be a very ruthless and honest self-examination and not simply flattery—then really you should stop. It's only by thoroughly knowing those other writers and daring to challenge them, even, that you would ever write. So there's always this paradox of respect and challenge, of recognizing that work exists that you should always be striving towards, which you have to look up to, which is fantastic and which probably you will never reach. It is almost a balance—either you have got it or you haven't. I don't know how you really teach it to people who want to write, because there is always too much of the one or the other, too much reverence or too much audacity: either "I know I can do it all" or "I'm so timid, I'm just going to copy."

INTERVIEWER

Would you say that some people experiment by simply disregarding standards without fully understanding them?

WINTERSON

Yes. You can't know what to challenge unless you know what you are up against. You have to know the rules, and

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then you can break them. But if you don't know them, then you are working in a kind of formless chaos, which is not to say that you might not accidentally produce something interesting. It will certainly mean that you can't repeat the trick, and it will mean that you yourself are utterly unshored from what it is you are trying to do. It makes you a kind of pinball in a great pinball machine. You fire around the game, and maybe you will hit something and maybe you won't.

INTERVIEWER

So you agree with what T.S. Eliot says in "Tradition and the Individual Talent" about an artist's relation to the past being one of altering tradition even as he or she absorbs and enters into it?

WINTERSON

Yes, oh yes. I think Eliot was also right to be very wary about people who want to express their personality. It is important, first of all, to be sure that you do have something to express, but also to show a care for language that suggests that it comes first, before you, before your personality, before your own ambitions. There is always that level of humility. Whenever we talk about writing, we start to talk about paradoxes. We've talked about respect and challenge. Now we are talking about chutzpah and humility. The writer is at once the most abject of people and the most arrogant. Because the person who really knows, knows the glories of the past and how significant they are to him or her, is at the same time prepared to say, And now I will add to them.

INTERVIEWER

How would you describe your own relation to language?

WINTERSON

I like to use lots of different words, and the accusation has always been leveled against me: why do you use these strange words? The answer is because they're there. If you have a very

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refined and subtle instrument such as the English language, which has been in use for many hundreds of years, it will do almost anything you want it to do. But it is also an old language, so you need continually to be refreshing it, revitalizing it and putting it together in surprising ways, which it will allow you to do if you will take the time. That's part of my challenge: to make sure that the language I'm using is fresh and revived and isn't in any sense a clichéd language or one that doesn't demand any thought from me. I try hard to get not only the right word but a word that's got buried in it lots of other associations.

INTERVIEWER

And sometimes you offer up etymologies for words, such as *invent* or *metaphor*, in order to recover their lost meanings?

WINTERSON

Yes. Again, to take those words back through the history of the word and history of the individual using it so that we can see how its meanings have accreted over time, and therefore how it might be able to freeze up. Because there are small words with so much in them, and to loosen one out and put it back into common consciousness, I think, is a good idea. Because then when people see the word somewhere else, maybe it will have more meaning for them.

INTERVIEWER

Does your attempt to do this rely more upon poetry or prose? Does poetry lift language higher somehow than prose can, away from the realm of everyday speech?

WINTERSON

I think it depends who is using it. In the past, poetry has had that function of crystallizing and expanding the possibilities of language because of its preciseness. But I don't think that has to be the case. It is possible, and we have seen it many a time, for prose to work on the same levels that poetry does. Not

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all the way through, because you can't sustain that kind of intensity. The pieces have to be slacker. I don't mean that they should be thoughtless, but while parts of them are intense and fused and hard in every sense, others should allow the readers some space so that their own minds can relax a little bit. You have to be in control to bring in the densities of poetry and understand, too, that you need places—passing places, pausing places—where you and the reader can sit down for awhile.

INTERVIEWER

Do you see literature as making demands on readers to take some sort of responsibility for their own lives? Does your work challenge readers to see themselves in new ways?

WINTERSON

Yes, I do think so, at least I hope so. It would be a failure if someone were to come at my books and not be able to take away something like that about their own lives. I want my books to make them think, How could I do it differently? How could I have made more sense of it? But not everything works for every person. Some things that move me very much would leave other people cold. Which is why you need so much variety in art and why you need a lot of it as well. We can never have enough. The idea that there is a limit and you can't have any more or you don't need any more, which people cite from time to time, "We've got enough now, surely. That will be all right." Some people hate, say, Kathy Acker's work, really hate it. And yet, a lot of kids really love her stuff; it means something to them, it means something particular. It helps them to understand who they are in a very formless society. Which is great.

I get very tired of people endlessly slagging off work by writers when they don't know what's happening out there. If anything, the writers have a better idea than any critics or single readers because they at least get more feedback from a wide variety of people; they know whether or not things are

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getting across. There is something absurd about books being praised or dismissed by one person reading it in their front room and then writing up what they think in a newspaper. In a way, nothing could be more ridiculous, because while a book has to be a one-to-one relationship, it's also going to be a relationship with thousands of people, each of whom will have a different experience. One reason why I don't worry too much about reviews is because in the end the book has to survive on its own terms and on its own merits. There is a lot of patronizing reviewer criticism that suggests people want to read things that are easy or about themselves in a very obvious way. That has not been my understanding or experience at all. It always makes me laugh when I do a public reading. For instance, I usually do one at the National Theatre when I publish, and it's always sold out. There are always about 1,400 people there; they all turn up and pay their three quid. Now, what do they do it for, if they are not getting anything out of it? No reviewer—because they are so high and mighty—would ever go to an event like that. So, they don't see the people who come in off the street and want to know about books. It's the same with pictures, it's the same with music. I think reviewing is very isolated from the string of people who are actually going out and paying to experience this and wanting it in their lives.

INTERVIEWER

You mentioned in *Art Objects* that students are demanding your works in their classes. Why do you think your themes appeal to young readers?

WINTERSON

I think it is really to do with the kinds of characters that I use to get at particular situations. I have talked about the hero motif. That is something that is true for every young person: they have to be the hero in their own lives. They have to kill a certain number of monsters, usually escape from a wicked overbearing parent, leave home and go into the big wide world

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to seek their fortune. So, the hero motif is very powerful. It's in their own lives, and it's something that they can readily identify with when they see it reflected back to them in a way that tries to get across both the dangers, the perils, as well as the great pleasures of that sort of individuation.

But growing up isn't necessarily to do with young people; it is to do with anybody who simply hasn't done it. There are a lot of much older people who refuse to be the hero in their own lives, who put it off—a lot of women, for whom that was not seen to be appropriate, which is very sad. You always see young girls, full of life, launching themselves on the world, and then so quickly getting smacked down in the way that young men are not smacked down. Obviously, women are beginning to find that they really won't put up with that. They want to see what it is they can achieve for themselves. So, I think that's a large part of the appeal of my work. Because all my characters are on a quest. They're all looking for something that they don't have, and then, of course, they find that it is within themselves. But not until the end of the book.

INTERVIEWER

All of your works involve a love plot. And yet, things don't usually work out for your characters; you seldom allow them to have a kind of a perfect bliss in love.

WINTERSON

Well, I don't do happy endings, do I? They always end ambiguously by the water. I do not think that the endings are depressing, but I don't think that they are contrived in human terms either. Things are continually beginning again; they're never really resolved, you know. They are only resolved temporarily. We live in a society that peddles solutions, whether it's solutions to those extra pounds you're carrying, or to your thinning hair, or to your loss of appetite, loss of love. We are always looking for solutions, but actually what we are engaged in is a process throughout life during which you never get it right. You have to keep being open, you have

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to keep moving forward. You have to keep finding out who you are and how you are changing, and only that makes life tolerable.

INTERVIEWER

You are often concerned with journeys in your books, the space traveled—physically and metaphysically—between two points. You repeatedly circle around the idea that travel can take place on different levels. Do you see travel as a metaphor for narrative? What do journeys represent to you?

WINTERSON

Well, I am a bit obsessed with them. I have noticed this. I have also noticed how most of my books end at the sea or by a river, always some water at the end. Once you start recognizing your own obsessions, you know you're getting old. I suppose I am fascinated by journeys because—and my partner complains about this enormously because she loves to travel—I loathe travel. I will do anything not to travel. She says, "Let's go to this place," and so we get all the books, and I read about it and then I make up stories and describe it all. Finally she says, "You don't want to go now because you've been, haven't you?" Unfortunately, this is true.

I wrote *The Passion* before I had been to Venice. I just imagined it. I hadn't been to New York for seven years when I wrote *Gut Symmetries*, but it didn't make any difference. I do travel in my head. It's the old joke about the magic carpet or the broomstick. That's how poor people used to make journeys, because they couldn't afford to make them literally. Certainly when I was a kid, it was one of the games we used to play. We invented places we would go, describing them to each other because none of us could ever afford to go anywhere. I didn't go to London until I was twenty-one.

It may be that because it gave me all that pleasure when I was a child it continues to give me pleasure now. But it now works on a different level. It's something more profound to me, because it's one of those good metaphors, isn't it, the

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idea of the journey? Everyone understands it straightaway. They also understand that you are talking about an inner journey and an outer journey at the same time. It's quite a simple trope for conveying some very complex information. That is what I try to do—to choose something that is simple and yet works as an enormously powerful conductor. That is what the journeys in the books are really about, trying to get somebody away from victim status.

INTERVIEWER

One might say that your writing is characterized by a kind of excess. Have you gotten different responses to that aspect of your work?

WINTERSON

If you want something to be clear straightaway then it's probably better not to read my books. Read somebody else's. I don't really feel that I should be held accountable for writing the kinds of books that I want to write just because some reader I can't imagine or will never know doesn't want to read them. It seems a bit unfair. You can't win in the art stakes, because there is always somebody who is cross with you. So that's why it is better not to care and instead think, Well, I must really do my work, hope that it reaches people and leave the rest to chance. That's often mistaken for arrogance, but it isn't. You have to believe that you are good, because if you think you are rubbish, why are you doing this stuff anyway? And what are you doing chucking it out there for people to buy? I think that would be the true arrogance—if you thought your stuff was rubbish and still got people to pay good money to read it.

INTERVIEWER

Have you been accused of being arrogant?

WINTERSON

Yes, largely because I do insist on doing my own work in my own way. I suppose it is a take-it-or-leave-it attitude, but

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then people are at liberty to leave it. That's their choice. I can't second-guess those choices. You can't tie yourself up in knots trying to please all of the people, and you can't make a kind of computer-generated product that is just meant to target an interest group. I suppose that is what, to some extent, the publishers would like, because that's where the money is. But writers don't work like that and can't. If it is arrogant to wish to do the best that you can in your own way, then, sure, I'm arrogant.

INTERVIEWER

You frequently represent gender as a plot that we're handed. Do you see gender as something flexible and fluid?

WINTERSON

Obviously society doesn't see gender as unimportant; it sees it as extremely important indeed. And thereby many injustices are caused. I see it as less important as I get older. I no longer care whether somebody's male or female. I just don't care. Which is strange, because I used to care very much, especially because my emotional and sexual affinities are with women. That was obviously a very specific choice and, again, there is this business of having to define something clearly and really know what it is that you feel before you can relax. I defined myself very clearly as somebody who preferred the company of women and wanted to arrange my life as such. It's not that I'm not that person anymore, because my partner is a woman, and I hope we will stay together because we are very happy. But I have many more male friends, say, than I used to, and I feel much more relaxed about the whole issue—it's changed. But that doesn't mean I don't know exactly what's going on out there.

INTERVIEWER

Characters in your novels often cross-dress or play around with gender. Villanelle does this in *The Passion*. Jordan in

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Sexing the Cherry dresses as a woman, and is able to gain access to women's ways of talking when men aren't around. Do you see gender as a kind of performance?

WINTERSON

I think I do. If we can do a hop and a skip out of the nineteenth century and land ourselves back, we find that it very much is so: the eighteenth century is a century where there is much more flexibility. Men could wear makeup, for instance. Byron wore makeup, and nobody thought anything about it. He was the last man to wear makeup like that. The eighteenth-century dandy is not a figure who exists in the nineteenth century until you get to Oscar Wilde, and you know what everyone thought of him.

In opera in the eighteenth century, the composer—say Handel or Mozart—would simply write for a particular voice. He wouldn't think, Is this a man or a woman? He liked that voice and would write a part. So when the person got on stage, sometimes they'd have to be a man and sometimes a woman. This does *not* happen in the nineteenth century. You don't see it again until Strauss's *Rosenkavalier* in 1911, which is extraordinary. It does tell us so much about the nineteenth-century sensibility about gender, a huge fear of anything crossing over. Men are men and women are women. But it is a distortion. Take the plays of Shakespeare, for example. You are meant to believe that a man is falling in love with another man. You're not meant to see it as pantomime. You are meant to see and feel that element of risk and fear and danger and trespass. In *As You Like It* when Rosalind cross-dresses, you're meant to believe that she becomes a boy. You should not see through the disguise, anymore than the people around her can see through the disguise. I am quite glad now, because in present productions of Shakespeare that ambiguity, that tease is really coming back . . . that people are meant to have their own affections and feelings dislocated from their normal seat into something a bit more threatening.

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INTERVIEWER

Do you see yourself as taking part in a tradition of women's writing explicitly, or is that something that you eschew in favor of a broader sense of tradition?

WINTERSON

It's both. I feel that the broad tradition is mine; it has to be because I claim it. It's an inheritance, which is given to you, but you have to be worthy of it; you have to win it to make it your own, then you have to use it. It's rather like the parable of the talents in the Bible. The great lord gives out the various bags of money to his servants and says, "What are you going to do with it?" and then goes off. Some invest it, and one person buries it in the ground. We are given this enormous literary heritage—certainly you are as a writer—but then you have to make it work for you. You have to use it. If you just bury it in the ground, it's dead. So for me it is vital constantly to use the broadest tradition and to get as much from it as I can. But at the same time, within that, I recognize that strand in women's writing of which I am directly a part and which speaks to me in a very personal way. It has to, because I am part of that struggle.

As well as being a writer neither male nor female, I am a writer who is a woman. I am very conscious of that. I am conscious that the voice does get stronger all the time, the voice of the woman writing. Which is why I feel I have to continue, and do a bit more and take the bat on a little bit further, if possible. Otherwise, I am letting down the past as well as the future. You're insulting those women who did it absolutely to the best they could, making huge sacrifices at the time. There is a passage at the end of *A Room of One's Own* where Virginia Woolf says we have to work for women writers so that they will appear. My work is to do that work.

INTERVIEWER

Do you feel a pressure from your audience to be a spokesperson for women, for lesbians?

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WINTERSON

Oh, yes! But it would be a very bad thing indeed if I were to do that. The best I can do is the best I can do, which is my work. I have no objection to all of this stuff being pumped out; there really is a place for it. But I don't want to do it. I don't want to be a political writer, or a writer whose concern is sexual politics.

INTERVIEWER

Virginia Woolf in *A Room of One's Own* faults Charlotte Brontë for allowing politics to come into *Jane Eyre*. Specifically, she points to the passage in which Jane is reflecting on the limitations of her life as a woman and raging against the boxes into which she has been put. Woolf sees Brontë's introduction of this anger into the text as an artistic flaw. What is your view of the relation between political engagement and artistic creativity?

WINTERSON

I think Virginia Woolf was speaking quite rightly from her own anxieties, something that she personally was very worried about, but I don't think that she was right. It may be better to try to speak honestly even if that anger, to some extent, flaws part of the work than to try to suppress and possibly dampen down your own rocket fuel in the process. I think it's better to take the risk. You can edit it out later if you want to, and if you can't—because it would be sort of an amputation, or a surgery that would damage the rest—then leave it in, and let the passages speak for themselves. And let people say, "Well, this passage doesn't work." I mean, it annoys me in D.H. Lawrence when he starts his working-class rant. I have written about that. I know I do it as well. But it probably doesn't matter, because no work is perfect. We can't endlessly be worrying about how to write a perfect work. We can only do the best we can. So it may not be worth wasting energy on.

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INTERVIEWER

A large body of people want to read your work strictly as lesbian literature. Is that a problem for you?

WINTERSON

No, it's not. There is nothing I can do about it, so it can't be a problem for me. That's another one of the obsessions we're in at the moment. We will pass through it, and if the book lasts, then it will cease to be a problem. I have to take the long view and really not mind. Because it's only a slightly more extreme version of anybody reading the text in a way that they like . . . that it has become a group rather than an individual identity with the book.

INTERVIEWER

Do you think that lesbian relationships in your fiction come across as superior to heterosexual relationships?

WINTERSON

Yes, probably. But they don't in *Gut Symmetries*, no. And we don't really know what's going on in *Written on the Body* do we?

INTERVIEWER

The single most discussed aspect of *Written on the Body* is that we don't know what the gender of the narrator is. Did you intend for *Written on the Body* to be completely ambiguous in terms of gender?

WINTERSON

Well, no, I just couldn't be bothered. I didn't want to pin it down. I thought, There is no need to do so, so I won't do so. If I put in a gender then it weights my story in a way that I don't want it to be weighted. So I didn't. I didn't expect that a huge furor would arise. I must say that took me totally by surprise.

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INTERVIEWER

What do you think of the fact that some reviewers of *Written on the Body* praise your understanding of the male psyche based on their reading of the narrator as a man?

WINTERSON

That's a bit weird. But that's all right. It's an open text. To some extent when you read a book that you care about, you do build it again as your own text. That's inevitable. We all do that. You set up a very jealous and personal relationship with it, and then it can only be your text, and the last thing you want to be told is that there is another way of reading it.

INTERVIEWER

What is your view of heterosexuality now? *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* presents heterosexuality as something that can only oppress women; however, at the end of *Gut Symmetries*, it is not really clear who will end up with whom, or whether any of them will end up with any of the others. That is, you don't seem to be promoting the same-sex relationship at the expense of the heterosexual one.

WINTERSON

I didn't want to have a clear winner in this book; it is more complex than that. I think men can really get in the way when you are trying to sort your life out and get on with it. Because they just take up so much space. I'm not under any illusions that I could have been where I am now in literary terms if I had been heterosexual. I really believe I would not be. Because—and this has gotten me into huge trouble before, but I suppose I may as well get into trouble again—I can't find a model, a female literary model who did the work she wanted to do and led an ordinary heterosexual life and had children. Where is she? I am no fool, I mean I looked at this at the time. I don't think people's sexuality is really that fixed. I had various boys at various times as well as various girls. There was a part of me which instinctively knew that in order to be able to pursue my life, which was going to be hard enough anyway, I would be much better off, either on my own or

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with a woman. A man would simply get in the way, and I would have to use up energy that I didn't have to spare. I do believe that to be the case. It probably wouldn't be the case now, say, if I changed to a new partner, because I am sufficiently established. But I do think that when you are young and you are trying to make your way in the world it really is an issue.

Women who have tried to push it aside as an issue say things like, "Well, I won't even think about having children until I am forty." Then of course they are completely knackered. It seems to me difficult enough to have children when you have got all the energy of being twenty-one. Some of the people I know who had children quite late, pushing forty, are exhausted. They are not the women they were twenty years ago, and they can't manage not to have any sleep for two years. So by pushing the problem into the future you don't solve it. The issue of how women are going to live with men and bring up children and perhaps do the work they want to do has in no way been honestly addressed. It is simply being made into a problem that you have when you're forty instead of when you are twenty.

INTERVIEWER

In your last few books, you have taken up the topic of disease. It comes up in *Written on the Body* and then again in *Art and Lies* in which Handel is a surgeon, and you allude to it in *Gut Symmetries*, as well. How do you see disease functioning as a metaphor, and does it connect to other ideas that you have about the body in general?

WINTERSON

It's one of those useful metaphors that everyone understands. People are rather terrified by the idea of a degenerative disease, whether it's cancer or AIDS, which will hijack the entire healthy organism and ruin it. Even the dimmest people can see that this is not only to do with their own bodies but a kind of metaphor for the state crumbling away. So it's one that writers can easily use for their own purposes. I used it because I wanted to exploit that fear, to make people really

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sit up and take notice and try to fit the inner body onto the outer body, as it were. To say, "What is it that is really going on with you? What do you know about your body and your psyche, your sanity?" It goes back to the idea of people continually being at the mercy of things that they don't recognize because they refuse to recognize them. As we know, cancer and AIDS in their early stages are virtually undetectable unless you're lucky. By then the damage is done. I feel very strongly that people—because they shut so much out—are prey to destructive forces that take them over, gut them as human beings, leave them as non-functioning shells, and by the time they discover this it is too late. So that's why some of the stuff in *Written on the Body* and *Art and Lies* is not necessarily for the squeamish. I wanted people to recoil and to have to think about it.

INTERVIEWER

You often present forgiveness as an important gateway to healing. That's something that Picasso in *Art and Lies* must learn to do. She thinks about the abuse she suffered at the hands of her family and feels that she has to forgive herself for being complicit in her own suffering. Could you discuss your view of forgiveness?

WINTERSON

Well, there are only three possible endings—aren't there?—to any story: revenge, tragedy or forgiveness. That's it. All stories end like that. There aren't any that don't. I suppose it depends temperamentally on which ones you want to choose. I have noticed that for me forgiveness is important. I have had quite a rackety life. I knew that my parents would never forgive me for what I had done but there came a point where I had to forgive them. That was a choice I made, knowing that it could not be reciprocated, and perhaps not even wanting it to be anymore. It wasn't reconciliation, it was about forgiveness . . . Simply for me to try to look at them honestly and recognize what they were and not judge them and not be angry with them anymore. So, for me, finding in myself that

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kind of compassion was partly to do with *Oranges*, which is in many ways a very loving portrait of a monster.

In a sense, that's where autobiography does come in: my relationship with my mother was operatic; it was Wagnerian and tempestuous. She was this huge, huge creature, physically and emotionally demanding, and I am quite small physically. So immediately there was this contrast and this tension . . . This great thing constantly bearing down on this very small thing, along with the manipulations and the brutalities. I am wondering what one does with all that—and this comes up in *Art and Lies*—in that you can't spend the rest of your life saying, "Look how I've been treated; I am a terrible victim." This is Picasso's great saying, too. "I will find something else, I will put that behind me." It is only possible if you can forgive and let the bitterness go. I have found that most resolutely in my own life, which is why I am actually happy now. That was the first lesson to me—of learning to forgive other people, and I have had to do it quite a lot since. I don't mean that's because I'm a saint, but I mean you have to choose. In the end it is better to say, "I can't change them, but I can forgive them and I can change myself."

INTERVIEWER

Is it a way of changing the stories that one tells about oneself?

WINTERSON

Very much so, yes. The way you depict your own life is important. For some people, it's either revenge—they're always looking for someone else to blame and to get back at—or it's tragedy because the whole thing is such a bloody mess and they'll never get out of it. But the moment that you can forgive, you take back the power and the healing waters flow. I know that personally, and I find it in literature. It's the end of the Shakespearean comedies where, in the fifth act, everyone comes together and sees each other for what they are. You get it in *As You Like It*, where at the end of the play the characters return from the Forest of Arden, all rather

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sobered by their experience. None of them are what they thought they were or perhaps even what they would like to be, but there is a great deal of acceptance, and then, of course, the play's joyous ending. Even in the tragedies you find this. What else is there at the end of *The Winter's Tale* when Hermione steps down from the statue, and she and Leontes find in each other a reconciliation and forgiveness of all that is past? What was stonelike, her mirroring his stolid heart, is suddenly fluid and warm again.

INTERVIEWER

There is also a potential for a new beginning there, a clearing of the way for the future. You have written that "to continue to do new work is to continue a development of style that allows the writer to surprise herself." How have you surprised yourself lately and do you have ideas of what you will be doing in the near future?

WINTERSON

Well, *Gut Symmetries* was a very different book from *Art and Lies*, and yet it concerns all the things that have always concerned me. It's obviously my book. It couldn't be anybody else's book. It's important to be able to construct for yourself a new book that you didn't expect and something that moves away from what you have done immediately before. I have tried to do this. But I can't be sure that I will be able to go on doing it. No one can know that. In the short stories I am writing now, there is a kind of straightforward happiness and ease, which I always get when I have finished a book . . . an extra run of energy, which can turn into other things. That's a very nice time. So I am enjoying that. But I know perfectly well that the real work will begin in about a year when I'll have to start another piece of fiction, and I have absolutely no idea . . . That's a lie. I have a very tiny idea, which is not really an idea at all, which is something very deep in the water, which has a light, but not a very bright light. But I'll get it. So it's there, but it's going to take a long time to come up, and it will be about a year. It may be hell, it may be like *Gut*

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Symmetries, to get started on it. It may feel like utter defeat rather than something new.

There was very much, after I left London, after *Art and Lies*, a period of retreat and breakdown. Not in a sense of nervous or mental breakdown, but a breakdown of what I had become at that point because it was no longer of any use to me. In a sense, I was having to remake myself in order to be able to write *Gut Symmetries*. That process will have to continue. If I stop, if I stop remaking myself, I won't be able to do any good work anymore. So the challenge is to continue to do it, to continue to keep sane. Also, to remember what I'm here for, no matter how many voices tell me I am really here for other things or really here for nothing at all.

There is a fairy story about the prince and the black stones. On top of a crystal mountain is a princess, i.e. the thing of highest worth, the thing desired. The prince, the hero, the questing self, wants to get to the princess, the thing of highest worth. He starts to climb the mountain, which is crystal and therefore extremely slippery, difficult. On the way, he does all right for a bit. Then these black stones in his path start to speak and they say, "You are a fool. Why are you going up this mountain? You will never get to the top. In any case when you get to the top it won't be worth it, there is nothing there," or, "You're going to die of thirst, you're going to die of hunger." This continues all the way up; he becomes more and more depressed, and he thinks, I will never, never get to the top. Then, of course, eventually the hero does get to the top and frees the princess. He looks back and realizes that the black stones were the souls of all the people who had failed before and therefore didn't want anyone else to succeed, because the only thing that justified them was their own failure. That's a useful story if you are a writer, because the way is full of black stones. All you know is that there is this thing of highest value, of great worth, that you want to keep trying to achieve. Every time, up the slippery rock, with no sense of being able to get there, you simply have to stuff your ears and keep climbing.

—**Audrey Bilger**

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Cracks

Sheila Kohler

Fiamma fainted in chapel this morning. The teachers do not know we make ourselves do it, though they suspect we do. They even had a doctor brought in to examine us, but he said there was nothing wrong with us. He said he had never seen such a healthy group of growing girls. We do look healthy. Our skins are gold with all the sunshine, and our hair and teeth look very white in contrast. Weekdays we wear short-sleeved white blouses and green tunics with their big *R*s embroidered on our chests and our short green socks. Our tunics are worn four inches from the ground, measured kneeling, so you can see our knobby knees.

Perhaps Fiamma did not make herself faint. Perhaps she just fainted. The girls on the swimming team take turns fainting in chapel. We all know how to do it. Before Communion, while you are on your knees and have not had any breakfast, you breathe hard a few times, and then you hold your breath and close your eyes. You sweat and start to see diamonds in the dark. You feel yourself rush out of yourself, out and out. Then you come back to the squelch of Miss G's crepe shoes,

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as she strides along the blue-carpeted aisle to rescue you. She makes you put your head down between your knees, and then she lifts you up and squeezes your arm. Miss G is our swimming teacher, and she is super strong.

You lean against her as you go down the aisle and feel her breath on your cheek, and the soft swell of her boosie. Your heart flutters, and you see the light streaming in aslant through the narrow, stained-glass windows: red and blue and yellow like a rainbow.

Miss G leads you out into the cool of the garden. You sit on the whitewashed wall under the loquat tree in your white Sunday dress and undo the mother-of-pearl button at your neck. Miss G sits on the wall beside you and smokes a cigarette, holding it under her hand, so Miss Nieven, our headmistress, who has an M.A. from Oxford, will not notice if she comes upon her suddenly. When Miss G tells you to, you take off your panama hat and set it down on the wall. Then you lean your head against her shoulder. You get to sit there under the cool dark leaves of the loquat tree and feel the breeze lift the hem of your tunic very gently and watch Miss G blow smoke rings until she asks if you feel all right now. Her voice is deep and a little hoarse, like a man's.

Meg Donovan, who is a beauty and comes from Barbeton, says she thinks Fiamma might be preggie. Meg's mother often fainted when she was preggie. One time Meg saw her mother fall down from the table where she was turning around, having a hem pinned up. Meg has five sisters, and they are all at our school. She says her father says they should name a wing of our school after him because of all the tuition he has had to pay.

Di Radfield, whose thin lips dip at the corner ever since her father committed suicide in the bath, says Meg must be mad. Fiamma has not even got the curse, so how could she be preggie? Ann Lindt wonders who the father could be. There are no men around here except for the night watchman, John Mazaboko, and the servants, and Sir George's bones and those of his dog, Jock. Fuzzie, who wants to be an opera singer like

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Mimi Coetzee, says, "Maybe you can do it to yourself in the dark if you cross your legs and rock the bed."

In our school the only snow we have at Christmas time is made from cotton wool, and the holly is made of plastic. It is so hot we sweat when we eat the roast turkey and the roast potatoes and the gem squash, and when they flame the Christmas pudding, the light outside is so bright you can hardly see the flame. The poem we read does not make much sense to us, as April is not the cruelest month and it breeds nothing out of the dead.

Our school is surrounded by farmland. No one is here except the teachers, who are mostly spinsters from England, and the girls. The teachers clasp their hands to their hearts and look across the dun veld to the distant horizon and talk about the lilac in May. The girls loll in the leather chairs in the common room and talk about boys. They lie out on the lawn and listen to Elvis Presley singing "Nothin' but a houn' dog" on the gramophone. They sleep over sums in the classrooms or whisper in the library, as they pretend to look up Latin words. They move their mouths in silent prayer in the chapel and ask God, please, please, let Miss G choose me for the swimming team.

Near the school a few mangy cows graze, and mud huts stand, and wattle trees line the riverbanks, casting their thin shade. The river is hardly a river, just a few pools of dark, trapped water where the mozzies breed. Sometimes it does not rain for months. The earth cracks, and the soil strangles the roots of the flowers. The dust roads lie dry and white as shells, and in the afternoons when we walk, there is dust on our lace-up shoes. No fan-shaped sprinklers wave back and forth in the evenings to cool the air, and we are not allowed to take baths. The smell of sweat mingles with that of sweet dusting powder and Mum's deodorant and the 4711 that we splash behind our ears and pour down our fronts. Once the thatched roofs of the rondavels caught fire and the night watchman, John Mazaboko, had to come running with his hose.

The graves of Sir George Harrow and his faithful bullterrier,

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Jock, rest in the shade of a frangipani tree. The school once belonged to Sir George. There is a portrait of him in the library, wearing a monocle and looking old and dried out. Under his portrait it says he was a High Commissioner. The graves are out of bounds, but we sometimes run there to lie down on the cool marble slab and fold our hands on our chests and play dead.

Fuzzie was playing "All things bright and beautiful" loudly on the upright piano when Fiamma fainted. Fuzzie thumps when she plays the piano, and we make the gesture for an organ grinder behind her back. Even so, you could hear the dull thud when Fiamma's head hit the back of the pew. Then you could hear Miss G advancing down the aisle, her starched khaki jumpsuit rustling and her crepe-soled boots squelching, coming on valiantly, head held high, like a knight in armor. Miss G looked beautiful and brave, and the chapel looked like a castle. Fuzzie says Miss G has an *aquiline* nose, which means she looks like an eagle.

Miss G is lots of girls' crack. When you have a crack you see things more clearly: the thick dark of the shadows and the transparence of the leaves in the light and the soft glow of the pink magnolia petals against the waxy leaves. You want to lie down alone in the dark in the music room and listen to Rachmaninoff and the summer rains rushing hard down the gutters. You leave notes for your crack in her mug next to her toothbrush on the shelf in the bathroom. If you accidentally brush up against your crack, and feel her boosie, you come close to fainting.

Sometimes Miss G calls the twelve of us on the swimming team into her room and tells us to shut the windows and shutters. We sit in the half-light and listen to her talk. She tells us to watch men in their bathing costumes, how they swell when they come near a girl. She makes us feel we are the snake charmers. She says Miss Nieven is a lezzie with Miss Lacey, the English teacher, whom Yeats once loved. Miss G

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has seen them in the moonlight in Miss Lacey's square green Chevrolet.

Fiamma has misty gray eyes and pale freckles and thick dark hair. She walks very straight, as if her head were a crystal vase she was balancing on her shoulders. Fiamma comes from the lake district in Italy, and she is the only girl in the school who is an R.C. They let her into our school, but she has to come to chapel with us.

She lives in a big villa with many servants. She is supposed to be a princess or something like that, and before she arrived, Miss Nieven told us to be polite and treat her kindly.

We learned about Bloody Mary in history and how she killed lots of people. She was an R.C. We read a poem by the greatest poet in the English language, according to Miss Lacey, and he asks God to avenge the saints slaughtered by the R.C.s. Perhaps Fiamma saw someone slaughtered, and she was thinking about it when she fainted in chapel. Perhaps that is why they have sent her away from her lovely villa, which is near a blue lake and mountains.

Fiamma has very white skin and suffers terribly from the mozzies. Fuzzie says Fiamma bathes in champagne to keep her skin so white. Di Radfield says it is milk. Maybe that is why it attracts the mozzies. Fiamma has big red welts on her calves and her arms. She spits on her mozzie bites and says the mozzies are eating her alive. Ann Lindt told her to use repellent, but Fiamma says it stings too much.

Fuzzie says Fiamma fainted because someone gave her the Black Spot. The Black Spot frightened Fiamma because she believes in vendettas like all Italians. Fuzzie can sing "La Donna e mobile" from Rigoletto.

We torture all new girls. We make them eat bitter aloe or swallow cod-liver oil. Sheila Kohler tried to make a new girl put her head down the toilet, but the girl refused. Sheila Kohler said, "But you have to," but the girl just walked away.

Ann Lindt says she does not think Fiamma would have

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fainted because of the Black Spot. Ann Lindt knows everything. She reads *The Manchester Guardian*, which is sent to us from England on special thin airmail paper and pinned to the bulletin board, where it flaps about in the breeze that comes in through the open windows. Ann Lindt told us we were in danger of war over a crisis in the Suez Canal. She asked Miss Nieven why the natives do not have the vote. Miss Nieven said democracy takes a long time to develop.

Ann Lindt has to wear thick glasses because she is always reading. She reads books by Winston Churchill, who was attacked in an armored train in the Boer War. She sits in the windowsill in the early morning before we get up and reads Winston Churchill's *Great Contemporaries* and looks up the words she does not know, words like *internecine* and *belligerent*. She says they do not read *Treasure Island* in Italy and so Fiamma would not even know that if someone gives you a piece of paper with a round blackened circle on it, it means they are going to kill you.

Most of us came here as boarders at five or six because there were no proper schools where we lived. We left our parents on distant farms or small towns. We traveled alone or in little groups for days on dusty trains through the dry veld. We arrived exhausted and confused, stumbling through the long, narrow dormitories, lit only by Matron's torch, and finding our beds among strange sleeping girls. The sheets smelled damp and funny. We lay awake listening to the dry wind clashing in the palm trees and tried to count the stars.

We cried for our mothers until Matron came and told us to be quiet, we would wake the other girls. When we got to the hiccupy stage she took our temperature with a thermometer that she keeps in a small glass of Dettol. Her name is Mrs. Looney, and we think she is, too.

Even now sometimes, we lie awake sniffing and hiccuping and imagining our mothers: they come to us in the half-dark, their soft breaths on our cheeks as they sing us familiar songs or recite rhymes we know: *She shall have music wherever she goes.*

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At first we saw our mothers' faces as we tried to untangle the knots in our hair, or when we left our soap in the big bath with the feet in the bathroom under the stairs. We thought we heard our mothers calling our names, and we ran down into the bamboo at the end of the garden, catching glimpses of them parting the bamboo and stepping toward us in green silk dresses, but it was the cry of a sparrow hawk or the wind in the leaves.

We made up imaginary friends. Fuzzie's is called Margaret, which is her real name. We call her Fuzzie because of her curly hair. She runs around the hockey field until the breath rasps in her chest, talking to Margaret. At night in the dormitory Fuzzie tells us stories of Chinese girls who have blue eyes and blond hair, and Zulu maidens as pale as lilies. Ann Lindt interrupts and says such things are not possible. But we like to fall asleep to the sound of Fuzzie's voice. We feel ourselves spin out into the darkness, round and round, like a leaf on a lake.

Before she fainted in chapel this morning, Fiamma rose at dawn and went to swimming practice. Fiamma may be an R.C., but she is an excellent swimmer. Miss G says she can teach anyone to swim fast. All you have to do is to desire it. Miss G says desire is everything. We all like the way she says *desire*.

Miss G made us all race this year, now that we are in the senior school. She said we could choose any stroke we liked. She made us wait forever on the grass in our thin black costumes, while she strode up and down the edge of the pool with the yellow whistle in her mouth. Miss G's hair is glossy as a blackbird's and cropped so short you can see the bristles at the back. When she strides up and down you can see the shimmer of sweat on her strong arms and the dark shadow of the shaved hair between her strong, brown legs.

We felt the sun burning the skin on our shoulders puce. We licked powdered sugar from the flat of our palms for energy. Then Miss G called out our names and had us line up. Our legs felt watery, like the reflections of legs in water. We

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giggled and squirmed and pulled the straps of our green plastic caps away from our chins.

She lifted her black gun in the white air and fired. We heard the crack of the gun. Birds shot up in the air. We flung ourselves across the water for the two lengths. We splashed and kicked into one another. Fiamma left the rest of us behind after a few strokes. When Sheila Kohler saw she was not winning she threw her hands up in the air and sank down into the water.

Fiamma says her house is surrounded by regular gardens with gravel paths and ancient trees and a stone wall by the lake. She says the house is old and large and filled with flowers, and the cannas flame red and orange at the edge of the lawns. There are flowers in every room—roses and sweet peas and strelitzias. There are lilies and peonies and baby's breath. There are flowers everywhere, she says—on every table and cabinet and inlaid chest, on every marble mantle piece and even on the tops of bookcases. In the entrance hall there is a forest of flowers. Fiamma maintains the whole house looks like a hothouse.

She says there are many old paintings lit up with little lamps over the gold frames. Mostly, they are so dark you can hardly see the half-peeled fruit or bleeding hares. In one of the paintings she says there are two women staring at you, face-on, with a sort of dead expression. Their hair is done up high on their heads and their stiff boosies are bare. One of the women holds a nipple of the other gently between her long white finger and thumb.

Di Radfield says she woke up early, too, before chapel this morning and saw Fiamma hunting for her swimming costume. Fiamma is always losing things. She is used to having servants pick up her clothes from the marble floors of her big villa. Fiamma brushes her cheeks with a toothbrush every night before she goes to bed to make them glow. She adds an Alka Seltzer to the flat water to make it fizz. She curtsies when she shakes hands with a grown-up.

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Miss G says that no one will tell us the truth about life, certainly not that bunch of spinsters who know nothing about it. She says, "Think of the water as your home. Learn to do without breath. Stay light." She tells us not to roll about or twist our shoulders or lift our heads too high in the water, but to suck a little air from the side of our mouths. She tells us not to make any splash, to slice silently through the water.

We all wore our panama hats and our white Sunday dresses with the mother-of-pearl buttons down the front for confirmation, because Miss Nieven said this was not a fashion show. When we were confirmed, we had to go to confession for the first and the last time in our lives. Sheila Kohler cried afterwards. She said she had told the minister she had read banned books, but she was not sorry, because they told the truth. Ann Lindt said Sheila Kohler was just trying to get Miss G's attention.

We know who has the curse and who does not because we play Truth in the dormitory at night. We put our hands into a pile and then pull them out. Someone sits on the sidelines and calls out Stop, and whoever has her hand at the bottom of the pile has to tell the truth. That's how we learned that Meg Donovan let a boy put his finger up her winkie. Di said she was jealous of Meg and followed her around for days like a dog. Di says we get the curse early because we live in such a hot country, but Fiamma is an aristocrat and they do not get the curse as early as commoners, because they have blue blood.

Di Radfield says she had finished swimming practice this morning before anyone else arrived. She says she saw the whole thing. Miss G was at the swimming pool early, striding up and down the edge of the pool. Then Fiamma got out of the pool and did a perfect swallow dive from the high board, opening her arms on the rising sun and orange sky for Miss G.

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Di Radfield says she remained silently in the shadows in the changing room, waiting to see what would happen. She watched Miss G follow Fiamma into the changing room, going toward Fiamma with the light behind her. Di could not see Fiamma's face, because her back was turned toward Di. Slowly Fiamma slipped her arms out of her swimming suit straps and folded down the top of her bathing costume. She spread her arms out on either side and shook her shoulders in a sort of dance. Little drops of water fell onto the concrete floor from the tips of her fluttering fingers. She stepped out of her swimming costume. Di saw her naked back, the bare white shoulders, the damp skin, only the cool morning air clothing her. All the while Miss G was watching Fiamma, and her face looked red and wet, her mouth slightly open. Then Miss G moved toward Fiamma slowly, put her arms gently around her. Miss G lowered her dark head to Fiamma's boosie and sucked. Di could hear her sucking like a baby.

When they had finished, Fiamma floated out of the changing room, leaving the door open. Through the open door Di saw the grass shining white in the early morning light and the soft yellow flowers on the mimosa trees like snow on the thin branches. Di Radfield put on her tunic quickly and picked up her panama hat and ran down the bank toward the school.

Di Radfield says she wanted to cry, because Miss G has never even grabbed her boosie, but instead she decided to tell Miss Nieven what had happened.

At evensong in chapel Fuzzie plays "Now the day has ended / Night is drawing near" on the upright piano, but she gets stuck on the first two lines and plays them over and over. The odor of incense is in our nostrils. Our sunburned faces float like pink petals in the dim light. We are worn out with the sun and talking about Fiamma. It is the sad time on Sunday night, and we cannot recall our homes.

Miss Nieven rises for the sermon. Her shadow looms long and thin on the wall. She tells us Fiamma will have to stay in the san for a while, that the doctor has to check her out. She has sent Fiamma our good wishes, as she knows we would

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have wanted her to. She says that this is the sort of thing that happens when you behave in a foolish way. She reads "When I was a child I spake as a child . . ."

On our knees we watch Di Radfield flip her hair back from her face and breathe out hard. She holds her breath and closes her eyes. We look for Miss G but we already know she is not there. We know what has happened to her and that she will not be back. Miss Nieven is coming to the end of the prayers, and Di's time is running out. She is beginning to sweat, and she turns pale, but we know she will not be able to slump sideways into the aisle. She will not see diamonds in the dark.

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Three Poems by Elizabeth Macklin

Walk Downhill During Heat Wave Elsewhere

The right movement of the right foot
on dirt under tree-green grass underfoot,
the right movement of the left foot:

This dance is a dance that is like sex,
a walk downhill—that weirdest aspect.
Gravity downplaying force; your grace next,

that side of sex. The cut-grass smell
not yet new hay. The tiny ticks in the grass
gone. Slant-sun grass grass-green

at ten, then under-tree green
at noon— A light, near-kissing wind betweentimes.
Walk in the heat before cool sleep:

a new turn—not some trick-play,
caught in stone on engraved streets,
where every step goes dead today.

I hear the city is one big catchphrase: "You'll
pay." As if each misstep would make a fall.
"No care too great, no care too small."

The Little Bees, Newly Busy

The bees came for their flowered blouses.
"Oh! Oh! Can't we wear them anyway?"

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A visit with coffee, phrases and clauses—
"Oh *my*. There *is* a lot to say!"
They ate all the cake and *sweet jesus*
but—uh-oh—were angry anyway.

"All that work and for what? These wages?
They come anyhow."
"Work in the center, work at the edge, is
a matter of *luck*—" "No. *Know*how."
Place, peace, money or times.
"Not somebody else's whatsit—aegis?"

The bees came for their flowered blouses.
"Oh! god!" But screens?
The heat in the kitchen almost froze us:
big flailing—big scene.
"What's *wrong* with these creatures?" "I don't *know*,
it's whatever they look to *mean*!"

On the River Ride at the 25th Reunion

What there was was a spherical rock in sunlight:
the full moon—its light on the strange but known
place to the east—over our side of the river.

I hadn't known at all what the moon meant,
first time round—light in the water
under the bridge back then, sound as a moving barge,

moving silently over the water. "They met
where the river is wide, after a narrows."
This time we left loud music behind,

inside the railing. We could've been speaking of "chemistry"
in idiom, the place where ore changes color in perfect solution.
We saw how our assayed selves could be graded now:

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awkward, strangers but precious. Like gold—not just for a
moment.
"He heard her saying how the old concepts ('Oh,
Chemistry . . . ')
had been as weird as a new lesson: incomprehensible but

the pictures more vivid. 'Yes,' he said. 'And I saw Music
different from you. I believed that you guessed
at modes and codas—a second exam!—but missed

how the two were the same. Or, so similar . . .' "
And then we were conscious of it—the odd concept
of chemistry. No longer slaves, but conscious,

able to be brilliant at the one moment only,
as if by surprise. Wanting all to be well—
But we know more now about the insides—eyes, heart,

the small charge that topples the trees of calcium—
of attraction. And instead we embraced
and found a solution in joking, in storytelling.

No need to discern the old needs in the new fellow-passenger,
unproved but proven. And I've changed the story slightly:
to a different scene, a different night—clouds, moon,

stars—seen at a glance in the dark from the lights
of a different ferry, with other loud music. It's a different kind
of insistence, I promise—a longing for non-insistence,

the two protagonists grown
up in the meantime, unproved but still
proven, in this boat neighbors.

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Two Poems by Billy Collins

Picnic, Lightning

My very photogenic mother died in a freak accident
(picnic, lightning) when I was three . . .
—Lolita

It is possible to be struck by a meteor
or a single-engine plane
while reading in a chair at home.
Pedestrians are flattened by safes
falling from rooftops
mostly within the panels of the comics,
but still, we know it is possible,
as well as the flash of summer lightning,
the thermos toppling over,
spilling out on the grass.

And we know the message
can be delivered from within.
The heart, no valentine,
decides to quit after lunch,
the power shut off like a switch,
or a tiny dark ship is unmoored
into the flow of the body's rivers,
the brain a monastery,
defenseless on the shore.

This is what I think about
when I shovel compost
into a wheelbarrow,
and when I fill the long flower boxes,
then press into rows
the limp roots of red impatiens—

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the instant hand of Death
always ready to burst forth
from the sleeve of his voluminous cloak.

Then the soil is full of marvels,
bits of leaf like flakes off a fresco,
red-brown pine needles, a beetle quick
to burrow back under the loam.
Then the wheelbarrow is a wilder blue,
the clouds a brighter white,

and all I hear is the rasp of the steel edge
against a round stone,
the small plants singing
with lifted faces, and the click
of the sundial
as one hour sweeps into the next.

Musée des Beaux Arts Revisited

As far as mental anguish goes,
the old painters were no fools.
They understood how the mind,
the freakiest dungeon in the castle,
can effortlessly imagine a crab with the face of a priest
or an end table complete with genitals.

And they knew that the truly monstrous
lies not so much in the wildly shocking,
a skeleton spinning a wheel of fire, say,
but in the small prosaic touch
added to a tableau of the hellish,
the detail at the heart of the horrid.

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In Bosch's *The Temptation of St. Anthony*,
for instance, how it is not so much
the boar-faced man in the pea-green dress
that frightens, but the white mandolin he carries,
not the hooded corpse in a basket
but the way the basket is rigged to hang from a bare branch;

how, what must have driven St. Anthony
to the mossy brink of despair
was not the big, angry-looking fish
in the central panel,
the one with the two mouse-like creatures
conferring on its tail,
but rather what the fish is wearing:

a kind of pale orange officer's cape
and, over that,
a metal body-helmet secured by silvery wires,
and, yes, the ultimate test of faith—
the sensible buckled chin strap
and the tiny sword that hangs from the thing,
that nightmare carp,
secure in its brown leather scabbard.

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Two Poems by Jordan Smith

Still

I fell in love with the Siberian Iris
In the garden catalog,
Slender-stemmed, indigo shading to violet,
As if such modest frailty
Might shape a border
Of grace, of felicity.

What does it matter where I speak from?
The dog lying breathless at my feet,
Torpid in this humid heat,
Kids calling beyond the fence,
An old song in the open book
Of nymphs and shepherds, comforted—

All comfort is by artifice
The world drawn, withdrawn into a garden,
The weeds and briars, by a beloved hand
Rendered as calm as a botanical
Print, as still, as
Someone's voice saying, *enough*, *enough*,
Be still now . . . , as I say to the dog,

Who is old and scrabbles
For purchase on the tile floor,
Then limps off to her bowl,
Still cheerful, still dutifully
Dogged by her appetite,
Then sleeps and runs still in her sleep.

The weeds are thick after a week of rain,
And around an oak stump, a clump

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Of what look like (but can't be) morels
Nod, in pleasant imitation
Of what is good.
And how should I prefer the good

To the commonplace (a platitude,
A flat-voiced warning to a child about deceit,
About what's wild), whatever is enough.
These iris will spread,
The catalog promises, and who
Will tell the first bloom from the last, who
Will know, so sure
Their repetition, that time
Has even passed.

Matter

First there was the revelation that I did not matter.
There was a kind of freedom in that.
I could stand in my office above the garage,
In the clutter of files and insurance bills, postits and catalogs,
Thoreau's "ton of brick," the finally
Untranscendent,
And be the simple instrument
Of necessity,
Played in this minor, suburban scale.

If this is enlightenment, I thought,
Then it has nothing to do with simplicity,
With silence, the moon suddenly
Gone from the spavined bucket.
It is the moment when the disciple sets out,
Warned against persecution, assured
Of the pentecost,

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The testimony in tongues, the single-
Minded speech of what will not cohere.

Here is the tongue of the notebook, like blue coal
Rattling in a half-empty scuttle,
And the broken E-string of my older son's violin
Like him, a tongue of barely contained fire.
And the bank statements, impolitic, reductive,
The photo album, with its babel of allegiances,
The address book's aphasiac stutter.

And outside the window, what was there to trust?

If I bowed my head slightly, who can blame me,
Who could not translate any of this
Into any language but belief's.

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Two Poems by Terry Stokes

Losing the Time of Day

I lost the time of day about three weeks ago
right after the siesta in the trembling rain,
right after the blue dream in the saffron forest,
right after the day of purple spotlights
in the auburn bathroom of pain, right after
I had left the pollinated tub with its brim
laughing, sighing, asking me
for something like the time of day
or a phone number flashing off a clock, &
it's my own number, & I've been to that place
today, & I should say not happily, no dreams, no
smoking, my gas tank opened—this, you see,
can only get dull; it's not full
of the rich laughter of delusion, is
not helpless, weeping, soaking
its salty thumb, is making sense,
is beyond the boring pale gesture
of speech, is learning
to listen to the voices from next door
as they whisper of loss or terror,
of going up against the darkness, the duende,
the reach of the suicidal claw cracking
through the closed window, the shower
beyond words, speechless, cringing as any
good showerhead should, & me sitting here
in the middle of this poem,
losing the time of day.

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Pyro

for Nadja

Some fires you start, you can't seem to put
out. It's that one match
struck, which glowers throughout
your dark ages. Where
does it begin, and what's the reason
behind it? Find out
& you're bound to singe you collar hairs,
the little poodle
from down the street comes into range,
you zap that bitter
sucker like he were a fourth of July
hot dog. Add relish,
throw on a puffy bun, hand it on
so you can get back
to work on yet another new spark.

Some fires you start for no reason
beyond the usual
bliss; the kiss of the match against
any flat cool striker,
the flaring-up, even in the worst
drizzle. Blinding at first,
& then, the after-image lingers like
sugarcane flaming in the
vague distance. Over there, where
there's yet another match
being struck, held aloft, your friend
from somewhere yells hello
& good-bye with one swift strong yellow
match.

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Portfolio

Unveiling

Shirin Neshat

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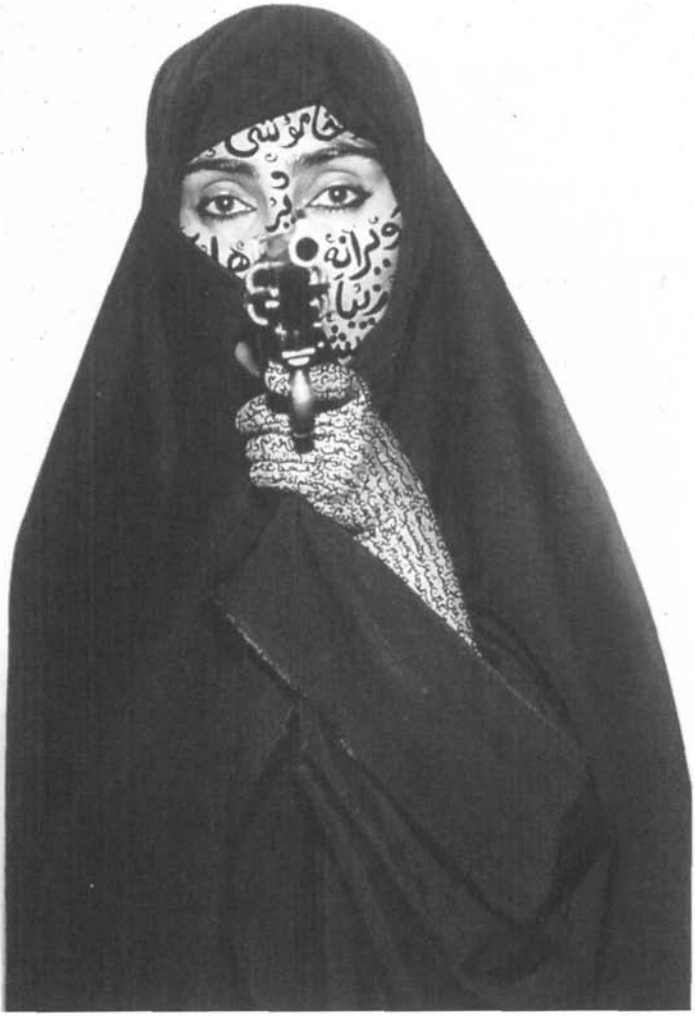

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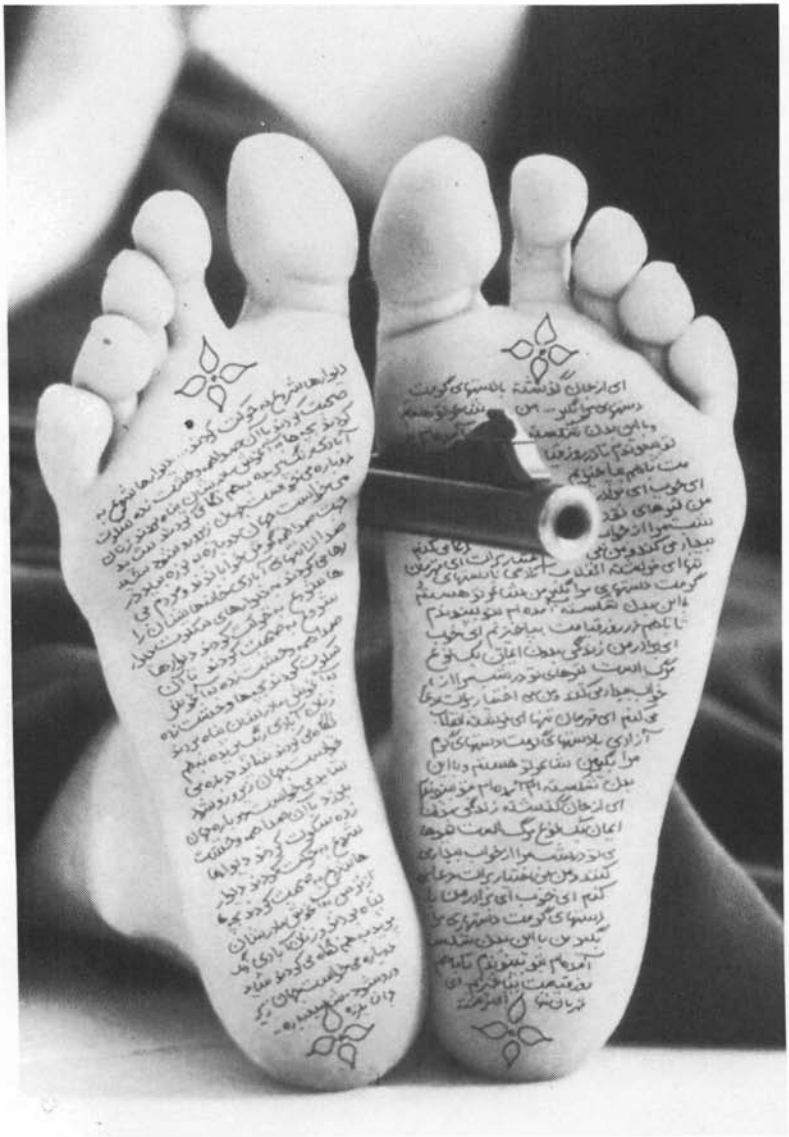

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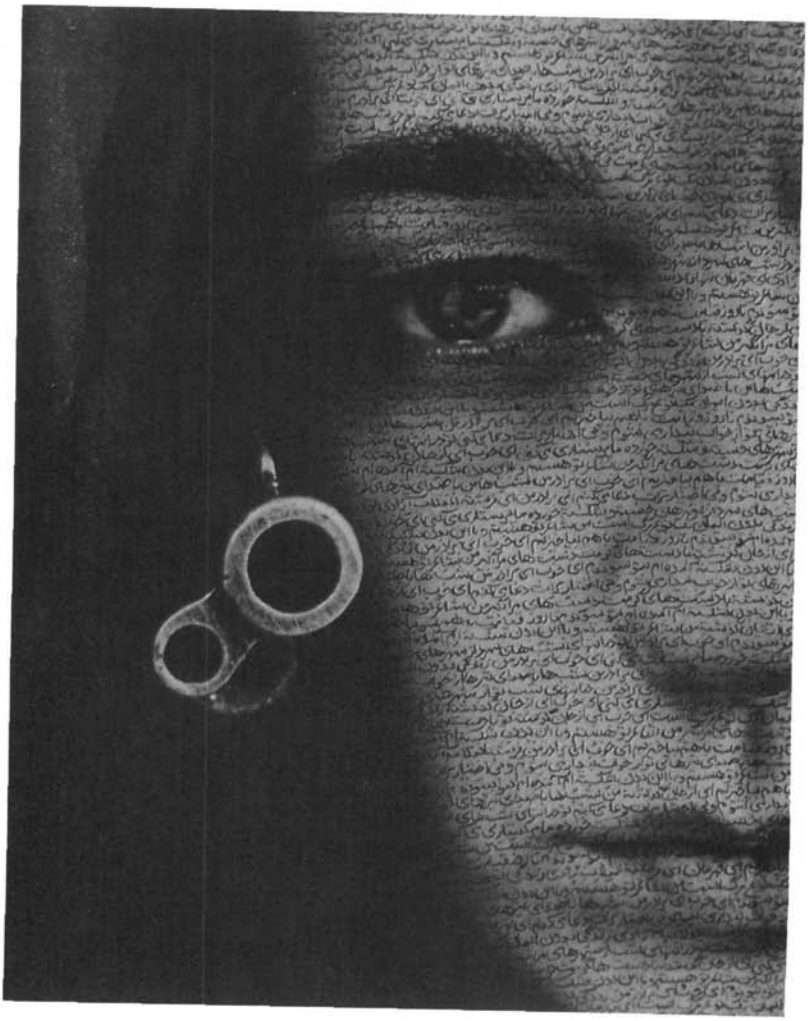

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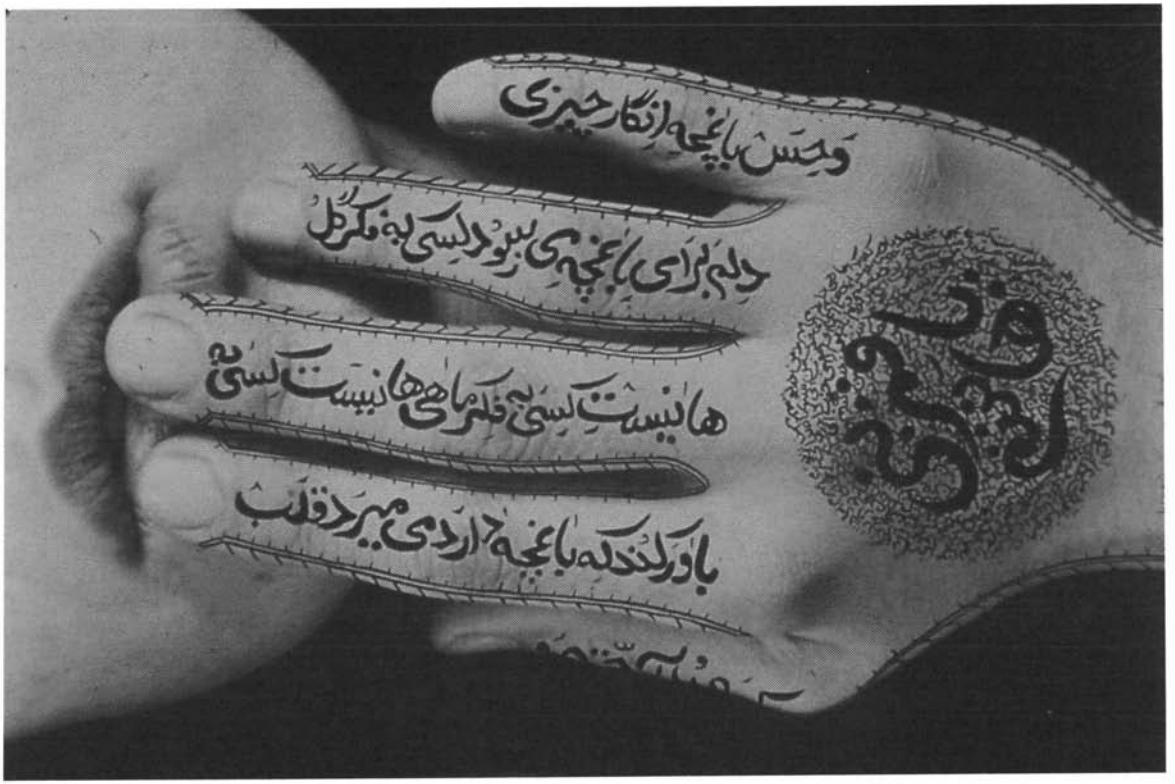

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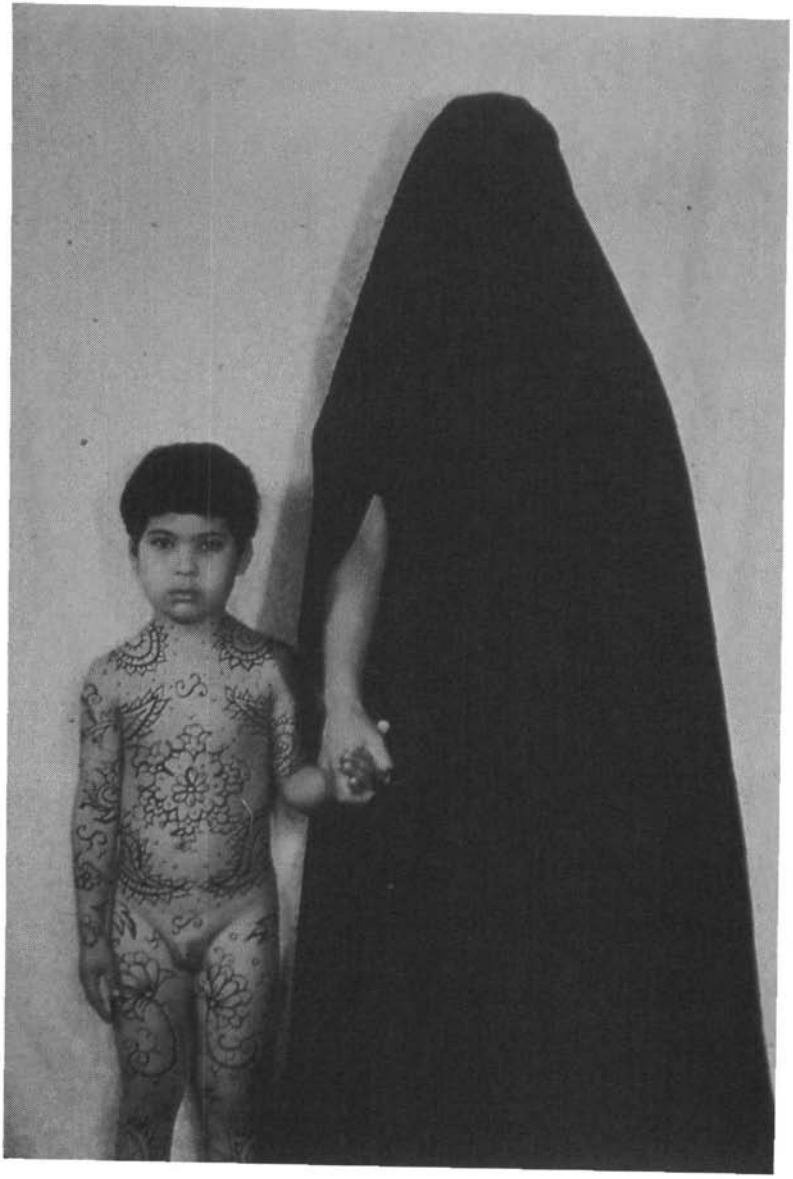

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from A Scribbler's Life

Being a Faithful Account of
Her Days as a Gentleman

Found by a Riverbank, Bound in Baker's String

Kristina McGrath

What I once was and how I came to be here

Once I wrote in violet ink in my boudoir, with slippered feet tucked beneath my chair, where no adversity but a little rain could ever touch me; no adversity, but what my own soul wrought.

I made a tidy income then under pseudonym of Henry Age. And though I feigned displeasure at the dampness of my chamber, a little rain yet delighted the nape of my neck as it trickled through a tiny moldering crack in the ceiling, oddly neglected by the crusty maid Felicity, who dusted webs from even door-cheeks.

Those were days when water boiled fast on a high fire, when the Dresden pot was warm and leaves were loosely steeping on a cold rimy morning, when teacups were many and matching,

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when the lampblack, which fretted me, was cleaned by the same Felicity.

With a warm water bottle at my back, I wrote in a trance with my eyes closed, bewitched by the vision of an impetuous Belinda or a Sue who ventured on a midnight, often bumping into ghosts, with flushed and heaving breast, toward the entrance to a dark estate, where all manner of startlement took place on the stair or with a throbbing in the scullery. I wrote for profit and with a strong pen, lacking in the niceties.

Oh, it was true, Henry startled and thrilled in every chapter. Being good at sudden climax for the benefit of serial installments, he shattered the monotony of a factory girl's life and woke the gentry from their sleep. For lurking round the corner of his every page were ominous reports of adultery, hashish, strumpets among the respectable, women's clothing on the backs of men, severely cropped hair on the heads of trousered girls.

But I was crushed by my own happy endings, which pleased the Publisher, who recommended nothing too contrary. For the sake of the nation's soul and the morals of Mudie's Circulating Library, my rebellious were left without a servant or a stitch; my impetuous drowned in the tarn; my orphans, my little thieves, fell ill, then, put to bed, grew saintly, adopted by an heiress. And in my days as Henry Age, I came to suffer a certain dolor arising from derangement of the bile, as my true work languished in a drawer, only sniffed at by my Publisher.

My essays of dissent, written by my female pen, he deemed too narrow an ideology—*a hotchpotch of witches and paupers, vipers in a bosom, contrary to Industry, Catechism, a Gentleman's Family*, when all I meant to say was this:

Twas a blot and a shame on the Nation's Soul when women were confined to the puffery of crinolines easily set afire or caught in wheels, when only crumbs of dusty bread were served at cottage tables, when seamstress and mason were left to the oblivion of their hovels, without a vote.

But what right had I to speculate on the nation from my

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bedstead, he wondered, to consult with only the pillows as to the Fortunes of cripples and dogs? And what right to abuse a lovely penny, to abandon Henry at the peak of his success and let the Mice have way through the musty walls at Tenoaks, where drizzle issued from a wizened crack in the ceiling as the thoughts from my head? Of all this, it was his duty to remind me.

So for the progress of my purse, that I should not be flirting in the streets or be forced to wretched toil as a governess from dawn to night, I wrote instead my purple novels all the week, till Frigg, the god of Friday, brought diversions of the social crowd, who thought me odd.

They thought me prickly, with awkward manners, an undue ardor for the Cat, and too benign a countenance at the familiarities of a shop-girl.

They chided me for being so allured by a certain Mary Hood, you see, who fitted me in lady's clothes, who bent to tuck and hem me, whose hair was curled and had no scruple, gone astray from round her ears.

Her diligent little fingers were the only tenderness I knew as she helped me to pluck at too many buttons, to crimp an Eton jacket at my waist, to choose a bustle, not too weighty, to smooth it with a petting at the back of my skirt.

And in this, I took the gravest delight.

But O, the trivia of the social scene; it was only flutter and plumage. Poor Felicity tired of portering trays and sweeping the crumbs of plum pie we left at our feet. My companions of an evening, with whom I was rumored to be of a knot at parlor talk, suffered an uncontrollable urge to only prattle, were most unfond of dust or rain (any kind of weather, for all that), or of any mess like argued conversation of the heart. This last I understood, as I myself was shy and put to task to speak a word; yet write, I could!

And did! and had my fun. But when I heard the creak of a shoe, I would hide my fiction, most especially from Felicity, who thought me worthy of her service and knew me not as silly, having read only my essays, more often than not with interest, during many an evening together.

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If not for her company, I would have kept to my bed. But, "Felicity," I said, "come sit near me by the fire."

My insistence that she stop her sweeping she considered at first a nuisance. Well known in the Town for her diligence, she took to the house with stooped back and a nervous fever in our first months together, though by the bells of Woofing Church she learned to rest. And if I had anything in the world that pleased me, it was not the splendor of a penny, it was her sipping at milk and tea, her appetite for sugar.

But unknown to her and to my companions of polite society—otherwise, I dare say, they would despise me—I had a mind for thieves and tarts, for invention of the wildest sort.

Years passed; what once was play turned labor. I was only a Horse for Hire. My obligation for one novel a year multiplied to two or three—all stubble and straw.

Though I found no pleasure in it, I put myself to bed each night in eiderdown, and woke each morning much against my will. I would often buy a brave fat goose at Market Lane, not caring what it cost me; but by the time I fell to it in the afternoon, my relish was mostly dissembled for the sake of the cook.

All will be well, I often calmed myself with a lie, and took it like an opiate. Even my despondency was but a drug, as I grew ever more scornful of my days at Tenoaks, a house which refused repair.

I spent an alarming number of hours in the languor of my bedchamber, combing the thistle, Hop-o'-my-thumb, from the seat of my gown, declining invitations to luncheons, which I detested, as I would only stand tongue-tied in the corner.

While Henry suffered no little amount of popular success, a peddler of vulgar wishes, condemned by some as sensual, a libertine, a tomcat, a chronicler of his own dissipated life, I stayed at home and tried at chatter with my companions, like a melancholy girl in a fancy dress.

Whether outraged or smitten, many a lady would write to him; and for a time, this I much enjoyed in either case, and answered their inquiries promptly:

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My dear Madam,

*My apologies. [*or *My thanks.] I should be excited and surprised, left standing, much humbled, on the side of my shoe, should you ever come by way of my sleepy Parish, seeing fit to bestow a visit upon an old bachelor, such as myself.*

I remain always yours,
Henry Age

No dear Madam ever came, as I offered no address, no indication, not even by shire, of my whereabouts. And while my yellow-back novels were sold at every railway bookstall, I would not travel, least of all to my Publisher, for fear of any hint that Henry Age was I.

I found my own words, at last, inedible to the spleen, though I had much enjoyed the shock I caused from Sensation in a Bosom, and the ribaldry with tarts, their tannin, that only Henry was allowed to know.

And he knew it with a smirk on fabled mustached lips—the creation of the lithographer. His cheeks were ruddy; I took to bed, alarmed by my pallor. And resolutely I refused to go to London, to leave my beck and holm. I stepped shy of fame, fearing that a lock of my hair should be sold at auction. I allowed myself to be the frill of Henry's lip and blouse, to be what came of ink and yellow limestone, the frippery of his neckerchief, the impression on a page which Vanity had made.

With more pennies than scruples, my purse was never thin.

But all my feisty heroines were fuddled to a common end. Maternity and Holy Matrimony, you may depend upon it, I blanched, and packed to go.

No more fiction!

I am here now, hand to mouth, in a scrabbly way and cannot always pay for the pot to boil.

Dog-like, I shake myself awake, spring from my bed with crumbs in my hair. I shrug off my gown, slip into my trousers at a hop, stumbling toward my one intention in the darkness

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of an early morning. At once, I am disapproved of by the Cat. She disapproves of the smoke from my cigar, which is a scandal to some.

But while some may object, it is my delight to be a scribbler and to live a scribbler's life:

I sleep and eat when I like.

With no notice, I'm dressed in two minutes.

Bent at my table under a low ceiling, I bark and clap at the parting of a veil.

Having given up my tawdry fictions, having doffed the crinolines and lace, it is Henry's simple black cravat I wear, as I live among the paupers and the witches of Huddlesfield Parish, where I continue my report on the nation from the confines of my attic room.

And when accepting a rare invitation, made to a dotty Henry Age by the few who remember him in a neighboring shire, I'm apt to disturb the splendor of a conversation with the most wicked heresy, being prone to cackle to myself in my days as a Gentleman.

I came to where I am by choice and by the high jinx of my clothes. With my hair tucked beneath my hat, I nod to the barber, the widowed seamstress and shoemaker, who marvel, twice perplexed, at the bulge of my breast and the smallness of my foot.

Now I wipe my pen on the tail of my coat, my hands often numbed with cold, with but one honest penny and a hope, much better than the false ones I lived on.

By the ruins of a wall, it was to the maid I left the bulk of my belongings, with a note in violet ink, which said only, *Felicity!*

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P. Shneidre

Utilizing Floyd

One thing I think everyone is nostalgic for, though perhaps without being able to articulate it, is a time when literature would begin a little less abruptly, without a lot of facts about cracker-named people before you're told who they are or why they're there, like so many dog-wagging tails or a pair of narrating lips set chronicling by one who imagined that a tone of voice, not so unusual albeit fictional as hell, were enough to transform you, with no appointment, into someone who knows and cares all about this triply fictitious individual it's nattering about, thought June. Well, if the only way they can get me anywhere is to kidnap, so be it; it's abusive but no one's put a gun to my head, just don't buy it this time, she thought, putting the magazine down. But one thing those pieces of literature don't do abruptly enough is end; that's one thing they should think about concentrating more on. It was the first time she had really let her consciousness down since Floyd died. Floyd was always saying things like that to himself, and now he was gone. Floyd was her husband, or told himself he was. Good, thought June, leaving the store, now I too have a dead cracker to stink up a story with. My life in art begins. It'll utilize Floyd at least once as soon as I get home, and then your husband as if he were mine, too. Go ahead and take me to court, all three of you, and take the readers too; it'll just give me another story to write home about and another home to send it to. You're in my art now, think it's like yours and it'll take you back to court so fast you'll think you never left, Floyd; you're a hapless undefended southern name anyway and as long as one person reads I can change that too, you expanding balloon of impure possibility, you thing-waiting-till-the-last-minute-to-exist-at-all, you charm, you goad, you undead puppet, you lifelike ball of faintly recognizable immortality, you poem.

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Vijay Seshadri

Visiting Russia

Another feast day, and the bells are ringing.
The bells are ringing, and not more
than a handful of versts from here,
in the garden of dead hypotheses,
Russia is rising from beds
lavish with nettles and pokeweed,
and from the stalks of fennel obscuring
the mildewed statuary.
Not more than a handful of versts from here,
closer than we thought was possible,
the Tartar ponies are pawing at their stakes,
the tents of the Golden Horde
are stretching from here to there.
Closer than we thought was possible,
Basil, Yaroslavl, the Pantokrator,
the fifth of fifty five-year plans,
the Vladimir Mother of God.
Much has happened in the years between
1200 A.D. and today, and it is
happening again right now.
To lighten the sleigh, a young girl
is being thrown to the wolves.
The Metropolitan is telling the Old Believers
that only with beauty can we coax
the divine into our nets.
The bones of the young girl thrown to the wolves
are half-immersed in strong moonlight.
Thunder in the faraway altitudes,
vacant and subliminal,
is throwing off the rhythms
of the villagers sheaving the rye.

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By the year 1200 A.D.,
Joseph is little more than a memory,
although threads from his coat of many colors,
along with splinters from the True Cross,
the icon, the censer, the axe, are being carried
to the taiga, the tundra, the Baltic,
flat today as a sheet of steel. A sheet of steel
incised to the horizon with faint,
steel-brushed semicircles.
A five-year plan for steel.
A region estimated to be the size
of Australia, untouched by man, rich
with fish and timber and tigers,
iron ore, bauxite, gold, uranium.
At no further cost to themselves,
Peter's cartographers have been given
the pick of the earth. The Caspian Sea,
the Aral Sea, the Sea of Okhotsk.
Few rivers traverse the steppe, its soil
is rocky and meagre, its apprehensive
inhabitants are prey
to princes, chief clerks, marauders,
Kazakhs and holy men. The feet
of their children are bleeding. Pushkin
is standing on a chair in his study.
He has just finished another stanza,
polyhedral and perfectly joined.
His thoughts stray to his faithless wife,
Natalia, née Goncharova. "Nevertheless,"
he says to the walls, "you're one hell of a guy,
Pushkin." Another feast day,
and in the rye field nearest the larger dining room
where a beautiful, archaic French
is being spoken, where
the candles have been lighted
and the table furnished with soup and bread,
a very old man is sleeping it off—
Sasha, without a tooth in his head.

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When Stalin's daughter,
when Stalin's daughter
fled to Delhi, he was still there,
still dreaming of fire and sword,
rebellion and death.

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Rachel Hadas

Out Into the Storm

for Lisa Hull

Forked lightning sears and stabs and stabs again.
The thunderstorm threatening all afternoon,
lowering and dark, has now arrived.
Time to collect myself and get back home

right now. I'll miss the bus! It leaves at eight.
But no—it seems that first I have to wait.
My generous hostess needs to load me down
before I venture out into the night.

Embroidered apron, strapless evening gown,
two leotards, ski jacket shedding down,
jumpsuit, pantsuit, polyester blouse
and much more I have no desire to own

is piled into my arms and bag and lap.
Burdened so I barely can stand up,
I try to dodge the lightning flashes. Now
may not be quite the moment to escape,

thunder and lightning beating their tattoo.
Nevertheless I know it's time to go.
My friend and I are out of words, though her
affection travels with me—and so do

these clothes. All garments have a history.
But my bagged, basement-damp ones speak to me
in silent urgent language all the way
home. Their talk (of generosity

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and impulse and hysteria) combines
easily with two Shakespearean scenes.
The theme is fragments—clothing, body parts.
We're broken animals. Can we rejoin?

"Poor naked creatures, wheresoe'er you are"—
thus, conscience-stricken on the heath, King Lear
bids distribution to undo excess.
"Off, lendings!" Feverishly he starts to tear

the fastenings of his ermine uniform.
He can't let others freeze when he is warm.
Meanwhile at Agincourt foot soldiers think
of Judgement Day, when every severed arm

or leg will find its fellow once again.
What fragments am I schlepping through the rain?
Nothing I really need. I'll pass them on
(though I do like the tunic—Calvin Klein).

Who bought and wore and tired of this suit?
Where and why did my friend then pick it out
and store it in her basement till the time
came when it could be bagged like ripened fruit?

Surely she knew that she was giving me
(unbidden) rags of coded history?
These questions are rhetorical—I can't
attempt to solve the riddle. And yet I

realize I like to check on what I wear
and when I got it, why, from whom and where—
personal strata changing day by day.
I like that memory can assign a year

to such and such a shoe or scarf or skirt
more easily than to a psychic hurt.

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Obsession, loss—such things cannot be seen,
unlike this necklace or this checked shirt.

And what we give each other finally
cannot be seen or touched—our empathy,
the stories of our lives until, just now,
I braved the thunderstorm and said good-bye

while my friend, having loaded me with clues,
mysterious remnants I was free to use,
stash or discard, stood smiling at her door,
waving as I scuttled toward the bus.

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Daisy Friedman

Dentist Poem

i

I love candy, anything really chewy and so full of sugar it stings like a Sugar Daddy. No matter how much I twist and pull, the long caramel tongue lasts me the full Sunday matinee at Radio City Music Hall, but just in case, I've also stored in my pea coat pocket a quarter pound of Swedish Fish. When the magician is pulling a rabbit out of his hat, I bite the head off one of my yellow fish. Tomorrow I have an appointment with Dr. Shapiro, my dentist. When I get home tonight, I will find my dental floss, which is stored somewhere under the bathroom sink. I'll pull the white waxed cord all up and down and in between my teeth. I will brush before and after dinner. Dr. Shapiro knows I like candy and if my checkup isn't good, even if I have cavities, he will still give me a lollipop. The only time Dr. Shapiro didn't give me a lollipop was the time I bit him. He hurt me so I bit his finger. That was many appointments ago. I hope he's forgiven me.

ii

This year it lands on Friday. I take the subway to my semiannual dental appointment and treat people as if I were wearing an expensive black lace bra or like I'm carrying a baby and no one can see it. Before my twenty-fourth birthday dinner, my teeth will be polished. I will smile bigger, brighter, better. Dr. Grossman scrapes, but one tooth makes no sound. That's a sign of decay, he informs me. How unfortunate! Novocain follows. Next thing I know, that tooth's a stump. It's not what

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I want, but what I'm told I need: please, this year, give me a root canal.

iii

Dr. Grossman enjoys his work, pulling teeth, drilling away rot and decay, filling cavities, and what he likes best of all is sticking his hands in my mouth, stretching my cheeks wide, wider as if pulling a calf, and all the time talking or singing along to Lite FM. Dr. Grossman and his wife take vacations to tropical locations with multiple syllables. His wife has lupus and swimming helps her. I have helped her too, by paying for their indoor pool, which they keep at eighty-five degrees somewhere in Connecticut. They have no children, but Mrs. Grossman wears braces. She is hoping to correct her overbite. Dr. Grossman has gaps between his big white teeth. He always smiles when he tells his dental assistant Tracy what to do and he grins as he orders me to Open. At home Dr. Grossman does exactly what Mrs. Grossman tells him: Grill the meat. Yes, dear. Today will be my last appointment until they notify me by mail that it's time for a cleaning. I just might let that go a month or two, until Dr. Grossman starts to wonder where his favorite patient is and instructs his receptionist to call me. I don't know her name because they change so often. For right now, Dr. Grossman adjusts my chair, he gently taps his foot on the lever and jiggle by jiggle up in the air I rise. For the next half hour I am all his.

iv

I inherited Dr. Grossman—the son of Mom and Dad's periodontist. I was with him before Kathy the dental hygienist met her husband, way before she struggled to pull the pink rubber glove over her diamond ring. I was his patient thousands and thousands of dollars ago, before AIDS and precautions like rubber gloves and face masks when I could still smell lunch on his breath, before my divorce and my move, before the bills came addressed to me. I always hated Dr. Grossman even

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when he told me I had beautiful teeth. I felt guilty dumping him. But when I received a coupon for a half-price dental cleaning at The Family Dental Center right in my new neighborhood, I took advantage. After the cleaning, Dr. Silverman told me I needed a crown. That tooth had never troubled me. While taking an impression, he actually said, "I want to make a good impression." The next visit I requested gas. On gas, I was certain there was nothing wrong with my tooth. I told myself I'd be done with him after the crown. I'd give him the money and never see him again. For right then, floating, snorkeling, my life felt fine. I was promising myself wonderful things: new shoes and sex. Out of curiosity I asked Dr. Silverman if he was married. "I was when I left the house this morning," he said, clearly flattered. It was only a question. He started telling me how great gas is "with a loved one." I burst out laughing. I was embarrassed for him, the white gloves flattering the hair on his fat pale hands, his repulsive little erection. I wanted to tell him: Shut up! You're ruining my high. People fall in love every single day.

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Two Poems by Kenneth Rosen

Men's Names

I got off my plane in a strange country
And saw you standing in the airport
With a blind smile, your eyes like diamonds,
Your lips slit, holding a card that read my name.
So I stepped up shyly. "It's me," I said, "me,"
And in a moment of amazing folly believed
That taut leathery smile, those cunning sightless eyes
Were for myself alone, that you knew me
Long before you met me, and I knew you,
So I followed you through the stalled nervous wanderers
To your filthy taxi with its meter ticking,
My fare flashing and shifting, your vanity plate
That read *Thank you*, and I too
Tried to smile as if facing an invisible horizon,
But it wasn't remote, it was proximate
And precipitous, though neither life nor death,
Only taillights blinking as you lifted the next card
From your bundle of men's names, pretty lady
Who once whispered, "Don't worry, sweet traveler.
I'll get you there. It's a short ride."

Float

It was a hard winter for the old eskimo,
Sent out on an ice floe by those he loved
More than life, more than seal blubber,
More than the split color of his sled dogs' eyes,
Polar green, polar blue, more than his sweet,

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Smoke-haired, slimy wives in the ink-dark igloo
Under a bear-hide with all their bristling,
Scouring holes that felt and smelt like anchovies,
Loved them because cruelty was the fulcrum
Of courage and pity a mere laugh after
A glass of whisky, oil burning and
Turning into shadows and dirt, loved them
Who sent him without talk, song or drumbeat
Out on an ice floe to see the rainbow. When
Will I wake from this dream of blue and white,
This day without night that is not quite day
Though it's always light? To float away,
Is it better than uselessness in the dark of ice?

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Seven Poems by Craig Arnold

Manifesto

THESE ARE THE THINGS WE THINK ARE BEAUTIFUL:
Flames and money with colors. Good thick paper
rubbing between the fingertips like oil.
  Red bell pepper

pregnant with smaller, greener, half-grown versions
of itself. Red hair overdyed with henna.
Early comic artists' ideas of Martians
  —green, with antennae.

Clear glass bricks that are somehow still opaque.
Natural hexagons—like honeycombs,
benzene rings, the fugitive snowflake.
  Epic poems'

careful attention to dealing out the glories
—whose sword pierced whose brainpan? Who shot the arrow?
Lingering doubts, left at the ends of stories,
  whether the hero

may or may not be crazy. Family quarrels
whose source no one remembers. All misplaced
loyalties, traitors, all who make their morals
  matters of taste.

Headlines naming a new computer virus:
Dante. Anthrax. Sunday the Fifteenth. Crack.
Cheeses, spices, colors, all that is various.
  Anything matte black.

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At the Assassination Bureau

What are your qualifications for this job?
I never miss a deadline, day or chance.

Why did you pick this line of work at all?
I love the symmetry, the play of force,
the smooth precision of well-oiled pieces.

How did you prepare for the interview?
I've always found it worthwhile to set up
as much sexual tension between myself
and any object in the room, as possible.

How close do you prefer to be to your work?
It would depend. One learns humility
in coming face to face with one's concerns.
And yet, nothing approaches the satisfaction
of an aim carried across a certain distance.

Explain the choice of typeface for your vita.
A ten-point Palatino, for the fine
Italian hand. The serif captures just
the right intonation: a not-too-fine
detail, a hint of violence—the Renaissance
has always been a personal passion of mine.

What publications do you read, and why?
Newspapers—never. I find the ink comes off
too easily on my fingers. I do not like
to have such traces of my presence noticed.
For magazines, *Cat Lover, Business Week*,
sometimes the Smith & Wesson catalogue—
I keep abreast of all the latest news.

How did you like working for Mr. X?
He was too much the type—how should I say?

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He let things slide; I am fastidious.
My mother taught me not to dig up the past
unless I could be sure where it was buried.

Arrests, arraignments, prior convictions—any?
I was arrested once. It was a mistake.
You'll find the details on my record. What
is written there leaves no room for suspicion.

And Mr. X? Had he become suspicious?
As I said, he was too much the type.
There was some disagreement from the start.

When can you start?
Yesterday. Tomorrow.
But who can tell? Perhaps already now.

Into the Wrong Hands

Marmalade will bring the devices. Keep them
damp and away from sunlight. Any sudden
shocks will set them off, or—if you're unlucky—
render them useless.

Click will be your contact. Do *not* post letters;
sources tell us the censor's onto something.
Same for the telephone—no calls, not even
boyfriends or girlfriends.

After Fritz and Handjob take their positions,
set your watches. Signal on each half hour.
If, and only if, there are two missed signals,
put down your weapons,

walk away with a certain cool indifference
(Handjob: not so much as to *look* suspicious).

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Barring mishaps, keep to the master schedule.
  Locate your targets.

Some of you may have heard, by now, the diversion
wasn't approved. You must rely on timing.
Lucky for us, the forecast is for drizzle,
  thunder and lightning.

Wait for the go-ahead: a flock of pigeons
startled, but only briefly, from the pavement,
landing yards away to resume their pecking.
  Once you are finished,

meet again at our pre-arranged location,
either on Thursday, if the date is even;
Sunday, if the moon is waxing and gibbous.
  Or, if the weather

seems to suggest, in equal measures, sunshine,
fog and boredom . . . You'll keep your airline tickets
handy. In the event that you are captured
  holding these papers,

shred and swallow them with a glass of tonic.
Failing that, maintain they are only poems,
old ones, formed of obscure archaic figures
  lost in translation.

Elizabeth Bishop Held Hostage

Your manners much in evidence: *please*
pass the water jug and *would you kindly*
loosen the handcuffs just a tad? They pinch.
We read the headlines: POETS' POETS' POET'S
CAPTORS HOLD OFF POLICE, DEMAND ASYLUM.

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They laugh when we present them our demands:
Safe passage to some tropical locale.
The immediate repeal of Modernism . . .
but whom else can we bargain with? the others
so straight, so unavuncular, such guys.

You give us just what it is we want:
anima, diva, queen bee, outcast aunt
seen yearly at Thanksgiving, and only then,
fresh out of prison, wearing a pound or so
of green eyeshadow and a biker jacket,
towing along a very special friend,
Carmela or Roxanne or Geraldine.

Maybe we win you over to the cause
the way the Symbionese did Patty Hearst . . .
Miss Bishop, we don't really want to hurt you.
Just tell them you're all right, and tell your friends
with the megaphone down there that you're with us.
We would be fools, of course, to think they'd listen
to you, to anyone. They'd come in shooting,
lobbing grenades and calling football plays
the moment they suspected something queer.

To break the ice, we mix up tall old-fashioneds
with lots of bitters. Do you want to talk
about the newest nightspots in Key West?
—Since Jimmy Buffet, it's all gone to pot.
Or Queer Nation? *—Bright boys, but so rude.*
We sit politely, hands clasped in our laps.
You smoke Virginia Slims without the filters.
Since you are comfortable, and we sincere,
you can be teased into some lewd remarks
about the local girls.
That's how they find us:
charmed into inaction, as always. Charmed.

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Boots

Aristocrats, they were
made to walk over,
to be proud of their scars:
the bold, barefaced upper,

the sole skinned by potsherd
or a broken Coke bottle
on the beach in Philippi
(who remembers all

the details?), the split lip
of leather, the lost stitch,
the heel caught in a throttle
and somehow reattached,

the stippled splash of bleach
from a mop, a coffee shop
in Berkeley or wherever.
The dust of half Europe

was packed into their treads
—try *that* in Birkenstocks,
see how far it gets you.
They will not learn new tricks;

imagine them plotting,
knocking back jiggers
of vodka and black pepper
with well-known figures

of the *ancien régime*.
High time they were retired
and quietly closeted.
Still, it will be hard

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to send them packing, to hear
the snapped-together heels
stagger, or to watch
their cracked leather smiles

stiffen in disuse,
scuffing off their polish,
and each day growing
more friendly, or foolish.

For a Cook

What I remember most is what he did to the couple
who sent his best pasta back to the kitchen,

pronouncing it "too thin." Capers and kalamata
olives tossed with squid-ink angelhair

—salty, he used to say, as sweat on a black man's cock.
He said this often, not only to shock:

food should be made with love, and love to him was sweat,
saliva, tears. *What do they want from me?*

he muttered, adding an egg—more Parmesan—a cup
of heavy cream—and tossed it all together,

the straw-yellow sauce stringy with albumen,
thickened with semen as an afterthought.

Now he is dead. I write the recipe of all
of him that's still out there in circulation:

tips of fingers and knuckles, pared away to scars
by the big knives, carelessly julienned

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together with the root vegetables, the stray chips
of thumbnail, here and there a curled black hair,

spit hissing on a skillet, a drop of blood in the sauce,
the oil of his hand glazing the dough.

Amateur

His interest in blades of any cut
is purely amateur, he tells me. But

I know it's more than that. As he adjusts
the angle of each sword, and dusts,

and keeps the edges sharp, his keen
attention to them is almost obscene.

I like him. Thursdays we sit down to drink
—gin, on the rocks, always pink—

and I take notes, enough detail
for ten museum catalogues. He can tell

a story for each sword—where it was made,
and how it came to be displayed:

The Viking snake-sword, haft hammered
out of a twist of wire, the grain blurred

under the finish, hardly visible.
The undulating kris, so hard to pull

out of the wound it makes. The mated pair
of hussar dueling sabers—who knows where

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or in what blood they spoke their wedding vows?
The katana—a samurai would choose

a weapon, if the yellow leaves
that floated on a stream would split in halves

around its blade. If possible,
he used the body of a criminal;

it was recorded that a witty felon
wished he'd swallowed a big stone

"to spoil the edge." It must not leave the sheath
unless it can be paid a death.

He drew it, once. One night he found
a teenage burglar rummaging around

in his display. My friend asked him to leave
politely, then, perhaps, made brave

by laughter, less lightly than he'd practiced;
his first cut took one hand off at the wrist.

No second needed. After he
had bound the stump, and called Emergency,

he wiped the sword clean, set it on
the foam pads of its cradle, and asked pardon,

true to form, of the blade he'd just profaned.
He then set out to find the hand,

which took some time—the light was bad,
or else it was the several drinks he'd had

to calm his nerves—but when the police
arrived, he had it safely stowed on ice.

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A fine story, though not one I will use.
Some evenings, when our interviews

dry up, he'll play an old record
to serenade me out. The one I've heard

the most of, is the pianist
Paul Wittgenstein, "second only to Liszt,"

doing Ravel's Concerto in D, composed
for his left hand; he had lost

his right holding out at the Russian Front.
The notes are low, and polished black, and blunt.

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Controversial covers of Evergreen Review.

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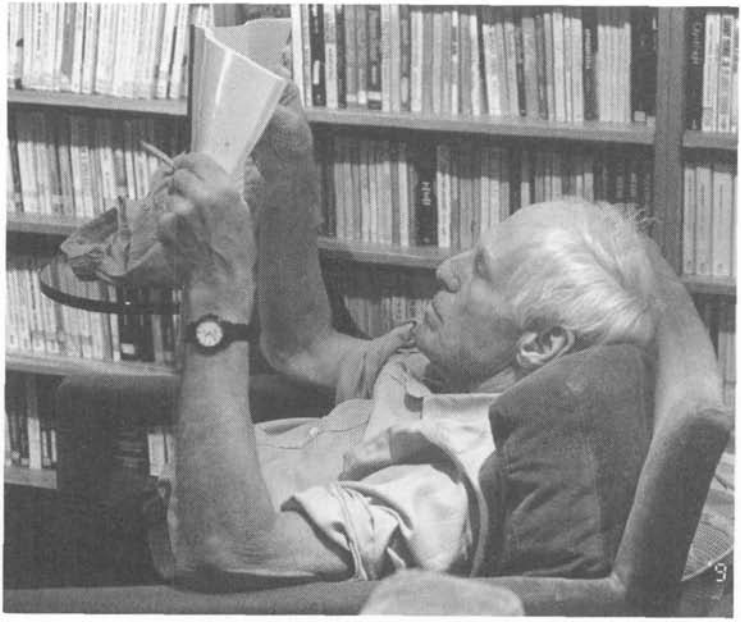

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Barney Rosset

The Art of Publishing II

Barney Rosset was born in Chicago in 1922. His formative years were spent in the Francis Parker School, where several politically radical teachers introduced him to socially conscious literature and to organizations like the American Student Union. After serving in the Signal Corps during World War II, in charge of a photographic unit in China, he produced a feature film, Strange Victory, *in 1948. The film was concerned with how, after we defeated the Nazis, racism continued in our own country.*

In 1951, he bought a fledgling literary publishing company, Grove Press, named after the Greenwich Village street where it began. For the next thirty-three years he ran it from various locations in the same neighborhood, developing Grove into a critical part of the downtown New York firmament and one

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of the most influential publishers of its day. Attracted to books that in some way—through their form or content—challenged the assumptions of the status quo, Rosset published writers other presses passed up because they were too far out, too experimental or violated the prevailing mores of the day. Among them were the Beats, the post-war European avant-garde, the New American poets of the fifties and the playwrights of the Theater of the Absurd.

Always undercapitalized, Grove often paid low advances. But writers came to Grove because it championed their work in an often hostile environment. In the fifties, repressive obscenity laws made it illegal to publish D.H. Lawrence's Lady Chatterley's Lover *and Henry Miller's* Tropic of Cancer. *Rosset deliberately set out to overturn these laws, publishing and defending these books, and others, in court. Over the years Grove took on hundreds of lawsuits, in the process expanding the range of public discourse.*

As the fifties turned into the sixties, and the Beat Generation gave way to the counterculture, Grove became the principal home for writers who challenged the American mainstream—from both a literary and political perspective. In addition, Grove produced a magazine, Evergreen Review, *distributed art films and, by the late sixties, added a book club and two film theaters in the Village. But when the sixties ended, the press abruptly hit hard times and implemented drastic cutbacks. Rosset continued the company for another fourteen years, before selling it in 1985. He left the following year after disputes with the new management.*

Following his strong personal tastes and left-wing convictions, Rosset had developed an impressive list of authors. Indeed many Grove writers, who were considered iconoclasts in their day, are now regarded as central figures in our culture: Samuel Beckett, Jack Kerouac, William S. Burroughs, Malcolm X, Frantz Fanon, Octavio Paz, Pablo Neruda, Leroi Jones, Alain Robbe-Grillet, Marguerite Duras, Jean Genet, Eugene Ionesco, Frank O'Hara, Kenneth Koch, Charles Olson, Harold Pinter, Tom Stoppard, Joe Orton, Hubert Selby, Jr., Michael McClure, Kenzaburo Oe, D.T. Suzuki, Kathy Acker

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and David Mamet. In 1988, the PEN American Center presented Rosset with its Publisher Citation for "distinctive and continuous service to international letters, to the freedom and dignity of writers and to the free transmission of the printed word across the barriers of poverty, ignorance, censorship and repression."

Rosset is a wiry man with strong hands. His hair is neatly trimmed. He speaks with a clipped staccato rhythm that communicates a charged enthusiasm and has a shy, introspective smile that lends him much of his considerable charm.

This interview was culled from over a dozen conversations held between 1993 and 1996 in Rosset's East Village loft—a long comfortable space with a pool table in the center and Beckett play posters from the 1950s hung around it. On several occasions, Fred Jordan, my father and a close friend of Rosset, who began to work at Grove in 1956 and stayed for most of the next thirty years, attended the conversations.

INTERVIEWER

When did you first read *Lady Chatterley's Lover*?

BARNEY ROSSET

When I was already at Grove. I didn't know much about that book, and actually it didn't interest me that much—only in terms of how it might help us to publish Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer.* It seemed to me that D.H. Lawrence was a more respected figure than Miller, that he had a higher hit on the ratings scale, so he would be easier to present as "literature" in the courts.

INTERVIEWER

What did you think of the book?

ROSSET

I didn't really like it. It affronted me in certain, odd ways. It was written from a very class-conscious point of view, which

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didn't particularly appeal to me. Lawrence's blood-and-thunder thing really did not excite me either—he regarded sex and death as mythological. The book was also about industrialization, which he detested.

INTERVIEWER

Wasn't the use of the word *fuck* a major issue?

ROSSET

Well, there was a very graphic description of sex in the book. It wouldn't be considered graphic now, but at the time it was. When he talked about his prick he called it "John Thomas." It was like a detached person. "What does John Thomas want today?" "Oh, well he wants *you* . . . !" Ultimately it's a good book. I like it better now than I did then. I mean, politically I did not go for it, but it was there, and it had to be published. And it led to *Tropic of Cancer*. Henry Miller did not have the kind of reputation that Lawrence did. He was thought of as a sort of bum, an early Kerouac.

INTERVIEWER

The Grove edition of *Chatterley* came out in 1959. If you started the process to publish it in 1954, why did it take so long before the book came out?

ROSSET

We prepared very carefully. We decided the best thing to do was send the book through the mail so it would be seized by the post office. We thought this would be the best way to defend the book. The post office is a federal government agency, and if they arrest you, you go to the federal court. That way you don't have to defend the book in some small town. If we won against the post office, then the federal government was declaring that this book was not objectionable. That was the idea, and it worked out in exactly that way. The post office has its own special court, where the judge and the prosecutor are the same man. We brought in all these famous

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writers. Malcolm Cowley was a witness. He was particularly good because he was deaf and couldn't hear the questions of the prosecutor—so he gave a lecture. Alfred Kazin was another witness. Picked him up from the New School, where I'd taken a course with him. Horace Gregory. The judge, if you could call him that, ruled against us. We lost. Even so, I felt a great wave of sympathy coming from him, the way he stated things and the fact that he let us put all this evidence into the record. Getting things into the record was really important, because the judge who rules on the appeal only looks at what's in the record. No new evidence was allowed.

INTERVIEWER

What happened on appeal?

ROSSET

For the appeal Cy Rembar wrote a very good brief explaining why the book was a piece of literature. He appealed specifically on the issue of what is obscene. They had tried to ban *Lady Chatterley* because they said it "appeals to prurient interests"—which meant it caused "itching" as far as we could tell. Finally we won the appeal on that basis—that the book had literary merit. I still don't like that idea. It seems like a compromise to me. But without my really noticing it at the time, that's what the defense became, and we won.

INTERVIEWER

You went through this with *Lady Chatterley's Lover* just to publish *Tropic of Cancer* in the U.S. Why was Henry Miller so important to you?

ROSSET

I first went to college at Swarthmore, and that's where I discovered Henry Miller. *They* didn't discover him—he certainly wasn't being taught in English class. I read *Tropic of Cancer*, which I bought at Steloff's Gotham Book Mart on Forty-seventh Street. Who told me about it, I don't know, but

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I liked it enormously and I wrote my freshman English paper about both it and *The Air Conditioned Nightmare.* My paper was anti-United States—it was all about what a lousy country we live in. My professor said, "Perhaps the jaundice is in the eye of the beholder," meaning my eyes and Miller's. He gave me a B minus.

At Swarthmore I got to hate Quakers. Detest them. They were anti-Semitic at Swarthmore, and there were no blacks, not one. They had fraternities! I say it with venom because I hated the idea. I was most certainly not going to join a fraternity—and nobody asked me. I really got disgusted by the whole place and was desperately unhappy. After I read *Tropic of Cancer*, I left—decided to go to Mexico. Because the book had influenced me so much, I left in the middle of the term. But I ran out of money. I never got to Mexico; I got as far as Florida and I came back. Four weeks had gone by. They had reported me missing to the United States government. My family didn't know where I was. I came back, sort of sadly. At Swarthmore if you missed two classes you automatically flunked. So I went to the dean. He said, "Well nobody's ever done this before"—there was no precedent for it—"so let's pretend it never happened!" But you know what, I was not happy. It did not make me like him. It didn't change my mind a bit.

That paper, by the way, helped me a great deal years later. At the Chicago trial over *Tropic of Cancer* the prosecutor said, "You don't care about Henry Miller, you're only publishing him for the money." So I took this paper, written in 1940, out of my pocket and started reading it. It made a big point.

INTERVIEWER

When you published *Tropic of Cancer* in 1961, the post office didn't seize the book?

ROSSET

No, they didn't come after us, unfortunately. You can't force them to. After *Lady Chatterley*, they never got involved

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in obscenity suits again. They learned their lesson, I think.

But if the post office doesn't arrest you, there are still many other possibilities for arrest. The local police can go into a store and say, "Take this book off the shelves," and arrest the bookseller. In Brooklyn they came after *me*, the publisher, and charged me with conspiracy. They claimed that Henry Miller and I conspired to have him write *Tropic of Cancer*—that I commissioned him to write it *in Brooklyn* in 1933! That was a mistake, right? I would have been ten years old, and anyway he wrote the book in Paris. It was insane. Then John Ciardi wrote a two-page editorial in the *Saturday Review* blasting the government, absolutely ridiculing the district attorney. In the course of blasting them, he told the history of the book, and that really helped us. I was brought before a grand jury. It was a big room. The jury looked like nice people. The district attorney got up and said, "I understand that the children of these people on the grand jury are able to buy *Tropic of Cancer* at their local newsstand." I said, "Well, that's very good. And if their children bought that book and read it all the way through, then those parents should be congratulated!" The district attorney just got laughed out of there by the grand jury. All the cops in America had settled on page 7 or something as *the* page that made the book arrestable. It's the page where the woman is shitting five franc pieces out of her cunt, and there are wild chickens running around—the DA asked me to read it aloud. I did, and that's when the jury *really* started laughing. And then *he* started laughing. And so they dropped it. The grand jury would not indict me. That was only one of hundreds of cases, all over the country, in *every* state—literally.

INTERVIEWER

Did Henry Miller ever testify in any of those trials?

ROSSET

No, he wouldn't. He was afraid. He considered himself out of that business. He was not excited about the whole thing.

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It took years to convince him even to let us publish the *Tropics*. He wasn't such a great crusader. He wrote me a letter in which he said: now people come to Paris to buy the book, and they bring it back, and each book that gets into the United States is read by fifty people. What happens if you publish it and we actually win the case? In five years they'll assign it in college courses and no one will want to read it!

INTERVIEWER

How did you convince him to let you do it?

ROSSET

First I went to his house in Big Sur, this crazy, strange place at the top of a mountain, with a couch out on the lawn overlooking a cliff—which gave me vertigo. He was out, but his wife was there, and she was very friendly, and lovely. Miller was off seeing a daughter who was in a mental institution from a much earlier marriage. His wife told me, "When he gets here he's not going to be friendly about this. I think you should publish it, but I will pretend I'm against it, because anything I say, he disagrees with me." They divorced not too long thereafter. Sure enough, he came back and we spoke. He was very cool, noncommittal. I did my best. His wife disagreed with me. She did what she said she would do. But he was much more interested in a book he was doing then with an American painter, Abraham Rattner, who lived in East Hampton, *The Smile at the Foot of the Ladder*. He wanted to talk about that. It was not a very successful meeting. So I had to go, defeated, down the mountain and drive out of there. Afterwards nothing happened. I appealed to Jay Laughlin of New Directions. Nothing worked.

INTERVIEWER

Laughlin didn't want to do it himself?

ROSSET

He was afraid. You know, he never went to court about anything. I had always admired New Directions. But Laughlin

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was dilettantish to a degree that I didn't think was acceptable. Why wouldn't he publish *Tropic of Cancer*? He was very important to Miller, kept him alive, but then he wouldn't do the guy's work.

INTERVIEWER

How did you finally get permission to go ahead with *Tropic of Cancer*?

ROSSET

I got a telegram from Maurice Girodias and Henry Rowohlt in Hamburg: *Come, Henry Miller is here*. Girodias was the publisher of Olympia Press in Paris; his father had published Miller in his Obelisk Press. Rowohlt was Miller's publisher in Germany. They had spoken to Miller on our behalf and were instrumental in getting his approval. I got right on a plane and went. There he was. He was in a very different mood. Much better. We played Ping-Pong. He signed the contract.

INTERVIEWER

What had Grove Press published at the time you bought it?

ROSSET

When I bought Grove they had done three books, all paperbacks: *The Confidence Man, The Verse in English of Richard Crashaw* and *The Selected Writings of the Ingenious Mrs. Aphra Behn* (the first English female professional writer).

INTERVIEWER

What was it that attracted you to Richard Crashaw?

ROSSET

Nothing.

INTERVIEWER

Then why did you buy the company in the first place?

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ROSSET

I was doing nothing at the time, and thought, This might be interesting. I think I paid $1,500 for half—which included the inventory. I took the inventory to my apartment on Ninth Street, all of it, in three suitcases.

INTERVIEWER

You had never done anything like this before. Did you have any business or publishing experience?

ROSSET

Well, I wasn't such a kid. I'd produced a feature film, *Strange Victory*. I'd been in the army. I was already in my late twenties.

INTERVIEWER

How did you meet Joan Mitchell?

ROSSET

I grew up with her, in Chicago. Her father was a famous doctor there, and her mother was the editor of *Poetry* magazine—her mother was a snob.

INTERVIEWER

But your family and her family were friends?

ROSSET

My father somehow made friends with them, but I couldn't. To them, I was a Jew. My Irish Catholic half didn't count. I mean, they were snobs.

Then in the late 1940s Joan and I lived together in the south of France near Cannes on the Riviera. I was very depressed. I'd just sit there and look out the window—it was very pretty. At night we would play bridge with this couple; they were real-estate dealers. Joan knew how to play. I didn't. This guy did. His wife didn't—but she was very beautiful. So I'd sit and look at her.

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INTERVIEWER

Would you say Joan was important to you in your early development, intellectually and artistically?

ROSSET

Oh, artistically, totally. Not politically. I mean I almost destroyed her, made *her* into a Communist. For a painter that was bad news, because that meant socialist realism. But you couldn't keep her down.

INTERVIEWER

Her sense of aesthetics was something that she must have conveyed to you, and opened your eyes to art.

Rosset with his first wife, painter Joan Mitchell. Painting described in text.

ROSSET

Oh, it was an incredible experience. I had watched her change from being a realist to an abstractionist. Day by day. It was very exciting. The figures faded away. The Tour de France, the great bicycle race, went through our little town. We went and watched it and then chased it in a car. She did

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a beautiful painting. The bicycles all merged. The bicycle wheels went around together. If you saw it now you wouldn't think it was so abstract, but it was like Marcel Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase.* It was absolutely key to her development, and I thought it was fantastic. Then she became more and more abstract, but that painting was key. Later I asked her about that painting, a number of times, and she said, "Don't worry, I know where it is." It was in her parents' apartment. I have a photograph of us standing in front of it. It's the only evidence I have of that goddamn painting. I don't know what happened to it.

While all this was going on we were totally isolated. But Joan had heard about the New York painters, Hans Hofmann and a little bit about Pollock. Hofmann had a school on 8th Street, and I just felt maybe that's where she ought to be. I knew it was where I ought to be. So I said, finally, "We'd better go home." She said, "Who's going to carry my paintings—they're big!" I said, "I will, but only if you marry me." Big mistake! She said okay. We got married by the mayor. The ocean liner came and anchored offshore. The paintings went out by rowboat. All those goddamn paintings. We lived here, first on Eleventh Street, way west, almost to the White Horse Tavern—a little house in the back, a dollhouse. Later we lived on Ninth Street. Then Joan left.

INTERVIEWER

She walked out?

ROSSET

She walked out and moved to Tenth Street, where she had a studio. I waited for her to come back. I said, "Joan, you've got to come back—if you don't come back, I'm going to get divorced." "Don't get divorced," she said, "I'll come back." I waited one year. So I finally said, "I'm going to Chicago." In Illinois they have extremely liberal divorce laws if you're a resident, which we were not exactly. But, *her* father, *my* father . . . So I went to Chicago. I called her. I said, "Joan, I'm getting divorced tomorrow." I charged her with desertion,

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and she agreed it was true. One paragraph was the whole divorce thing, and one other sentence. She kept the right to use her maiden name. That's all she wanted! That was the whole settlement.

INTERVIEWER

You got involved with many of her painter friends—Franz Kline, de Kooning, Jackson Pollock and so on . . .

ROSSET

All through her. Very inarticulate people. They didn't talk much. Motherwell did, but he couldn't paint so well. He had no passion. He was an academic. He talked and published books; he was a good teacher. I bought Motherwell's house in East Hampton after he had moved out. I lived there for thirty years. There were things in the house he'd left behind—including his family Bible. Didn't interest him. But he had left a little cup by Matisse, with a little erotic drawing. I told him that, and he jumped—*Where is it*? His own family Bible for generations didn't interest him. De Kooning had used his studio as his teaching place, so there were all these rolled up de Koonings. I wish I knew what happened to *them*.

INTERVIEWER

You mentioned that you had tried to get Joan to paint in a socialist realist manner. Could you speak a little about your involvement with left-wing politics when you were younger?

ROSSET

When I grew up in Chicago, Communism was my idea of personal freedom. Especially freedom to make love, right? Actually "free love" was a huge slogan used *against* the Communists. I never heard the Communists use it themselves—but it was implicit in Communism, because Lenin said "sex should be like having a glass of water."

After the war I joined the party in Chicago. Each member of the party was supposed to sell fifty copies of the *Daily Worker* a week. I would take mine and throw them in the

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garbage can! I mean, the idea of going through the South Side of Chicago among all these black families and selling them the *Daily Worker* took more courage than I had! So I threw them away. Then I was voted the *Daily Worker*'s best salesman. I had the best record. I paid for them out of my own pocket. They were five cents each. Cheap. Then in 1948 Joan and I traveled to Czechoslovakia to show the film I had produced, *Strange Victory*. We were disgusted by what we saw. We got there just after the Communists had taken over. It was not for the good. It was frightening. You could see the regimentation everywhere. That was the last straw. We didn't say anything, we just got the hell out and went back to France to be decadent, bourgeois slobs. That was the end of it for me.

INTERVIEWER

The theme of personal freedom, of your trying to extend your own personal freedom, was in effect the thread that runs through all the activities of Grove Press. Grove really was an extension of your personality, the defining of yourself as you published books, right? How did Samuel Beckett fit into your political vision, because he's really the opposite of an engaged political writer.

ROSSET

Absolutely. But you have to remember he was Irish. To me, that meant a lot. While he may not have been overtly political, he was very liberal, though sometimes it bothered me that he wasn't left enough.

INTERVIEWER

On the other hand, his drama was so radical it really upset the status quo.

ROSSET

They banned him in the Soviet Union. *Waiting for Godot* was not allowed. Neither was Henry Miller. The Soviets condemned them both. Miller would have been used as an example of decadence, being a very good analyst of how terrible and monstrous American culture was. That they liked, but

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they wouldn't publish him. I guess it must have been the sex. With Beckett, it must have been the hopelessness.

INTERVIEWER

How did you first hear of *Waiting for Godot*?

ROSSET

Sylvia Beach, who was Joyce's publisher in Paris and the owner of the Shakespeare & Co. bookstore, called me. She knew about Grove, one way or another, and she thought maybe we would like to publish *Godot*. I admired her very much; I was really struck by her effort, and she bolstered my involvement with the play a great deal. Beckett had already been turned down by Simon & Schuster. All of the established publishers would have had a much better chance at doing Beckett than Grove, right? They could have paid five times as much, but nobody wanted it. Nobody was interested.

The same was true of Ionesco. *The Bald Soprano* was put on in Paris and got a lot of attention. Don Allen, who was an important editor at Grove in the beginning, liked Ionesco very early. Beckett and Ionesco were on the scene together. They liked each other. I never heard one say anything bad about the other. At a much later date, I think Ionesco became jealous because he never achieved the same level of acclaim as Beckett . . . and he became a nasty son of a bitch, very reactionary as he got older. But they did admire each other. You have to remember that they both wrote in French, though neither one had French as his native language. Both were not that young when they started to get recognition. Both were struggling to make it in the theater, blasting away at the existing structure.

INTERVIEWER

Do you remember when you met Beckett?

ROSSET

I remember the exact moment. It was in the bar of the Pont Royal Hotel, which is next door to Gallimard. And at that time Sartre hung out there, as did Camus, and so on. I was

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with Loly, my wife at the time, and we were to meet Beckett at six for a drink. This very handsome gentleman walked in wearing a raincoat and said, "Hi, nice to meet you. I've only got forty minutes." He was all set to get rid of us! At four that morning he was buying us champagne.

Loly Rosset

INTERVIEWER

So you hit it off very well.

ROSSET

Right away. He was so gentle and charming. Kind.

INTERVIEWER

Beckett was extremely loyal to Grove Press, and you became close friends. How did Beckett feel about the other books that Grove published—writers like the Beats, Henry Miller?

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ROSSET

I took him to lunch with Henry Miller after we won the *Tropic of Cancer* verdict in Chicago. They had known each other from the thirties; they did not like each other. Everything that you read about these two would tell you that they were not easy people to get along with. But when I brought them together, each of them told me afterwards, "Boy, has he changed! He's so nice now." I don't know what Beckett thought about Miller's writing. In one of his very early letters he asked if I had read J.D. Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye*. He said he really liked it.

William Burroughs was a writer he particularly didn't understand. There is a famous anecdote about a meeting between Burroughs and Beckett, which took place in Maurice Girodias's restaurant. I remember sitting next to Sam, while Burroughs, who worshipped Beckett, was explaining to him how you do cut-ups. Beckett said to Bill, "That's not writing, that's plumbing." Allen Ginsberg and Burroughs were very unusual in the sense that they understood that Beckett was important at that time. They wanted him, almost desperately, to recognize them, and he just didn't seem to connect. It wasn't dislike, it was just . . . non-togetherness. He just didn't get it. If he had read anything of Burroughs before he started doing the cut-ups maybe he'd have gotten it. But the Beats didn't impinge upon his consciousness. Trocchi did. Anything of Alex Trocchi's.

INTERVIEWER

When you published *Godot* you couldn't have thought of it as a potentially popular title.

ROSSET

We only printed something like a thousand copies, and the first year it sold about four hundred. It wasn't until the play was produced on Broadway a couple of years later—with Bert Lahr playing Estragon—that the book started to sell, though the production only lasted six weeks in New York. The audience

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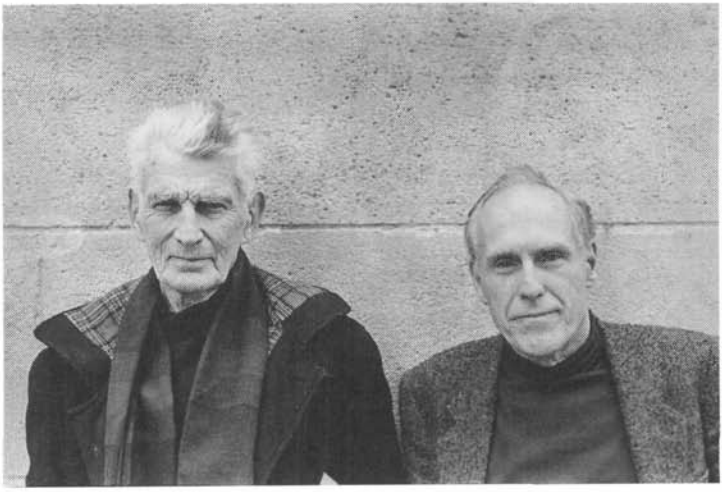

Samuel Beckett and Barney Rosset, 1986.

walked out and Walter Winchell denounced it as the new Communist propaganda. But that production made it famous.

INTERVIEWER

How many copies of *Godot* did Grove end up selling?

ROSSET

Well over two million.

INTERVIEWER

Not bad for a play so widely panned when it opened. Were there other eventual successes that you turned down?

ROSSET

I had the genius to turn down Lawrence Durrell's *Justine*. I thought it was shit.

INTERVIEWER

The title should have attracted you.

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INTERVIEWER

It did, but when I read it I was very disappointed. I didn't see the connection between his *Justine* and Sade's, which we *did* publish at Grove. The story went back and forth in time. I have a real block against that. Science fiction or wandering between the centuries never appealed to me. But I tell you, if I knew how it was going to sell, I would have bought it. And if I knew how Tolkien, who was offered to me, was going to sell, you better believe I'd have published it. But I couldn't understand a word of it. I mean, I didn't object to it. It wasn't like it was a fascist tract.

INTERVIEWER

Another book Grove published in the U.S. was Jean Genet's *Our Lady of the Flowers.*

ROSSET

I discovered Genet at the Gotham Book Mart in 1940. I have a beautiful blue leather edition of *Our Lady of the Flowers* done by a French publisher in English. But Genet was impossible. He was a thief and a scoundrel and a crook. We met him in Monmartre. We were forewarned that Genet was a kleptomaniac. That night Loly was wearing very lovely earrings. We ate at a restaurant at the top of Monmartre, and Genet took us to the window. He said, "Can you see the view, and all the things going on down there?" The whole time Loly has her hands over her ears because Genet was trying to get the earrings off! But not a word was spoken about it. Jean Genet was a thief, but he was a *real* thief. He was a thief from the inside out. Like Sartre said, he was a saintly thief.

INTERVIEWER

You're known in publishing circles to be the only publisher who would say no to a book because another publisher wanted to do it. If you were told that Knopf wanted a book, you'd say, "Let them have it."

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ROSSET

Well, that makes sense, because if Knopf could publish it, then it was a Knopf book not a Grove book. Many of the books that we did were rejected by thirty or forty publishers. Some of the best books, in fact.

INTERVIEWER

Do you think that it's possible for a young publisher to do something like Grove again today?

ROSSET

In terms of editorial judgment, yes. If you had enough money. I told a friend the other night that if you want to be a publisher, you should inherit a lot of money. If you don't inherit it, then you should marry a very rich girl. Preferably both! If you don't have either, forget it. That's the history of good American publishing. It was true for Knopf, Viking, New Directions, Scribner. Marshal Field financed Simon & Schuster when they were almost broke. He was a *good* capitalist: he bought Simon & Schuster when it was at a low ebb, and when it got successful he sold it back to them for what he paid for it.

INTERVIEWER

It's also true that the success of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* and *Tropic of Cancer* brought in a lot of revenue that small publishers normally wouldn't have.

ROSSET

Today you'd have to do it very differently than we did. I don't know how you would do it with only hardcover books. That would really puzzle me. Paperback I think would be your chance, but you would have to hook it on to something special.

INTERVIEWER

Recently the Whitney Museum put on a large show dedicated to the Beat Generation, to the writers and artists who

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were associated with that movement. A number of Grove Press publications were displayed as part of the exhibit.

ROSSET

I didn't even go to that show. The whole thing of the Beats has gotten so nebulous and open-ended—so many various writers and artists put under that same heading—that it's become meaningless to me. Jackson Pollock was in that show. I mean, if you asked Pollock about the Beats, he wouldn't have known what the hell you were talking about. The abstract painters were working with space and the relationship of color to color, how to make it move back and forth. They weren't writing about sex.

INTERVIEWER

But weren't they at least influenced by each other—they traveled in similar circles.

ROSSET

They may have been in the same room at the same time, but they wouldn't have known it. Pollock didn't read the Beats. Pollock didn't read anything. Neither did de Kooning. They were artists; they weren't writers. Sure, with Kerouac there was a certain pride in illiteracy. But the painters weren't even *aware* that they were illiterate!

INTERVIEWER

But didn't the Beat writers, when they were younger, look up to Pollock and de Kooning?

ROSSET

I never once heard any of the Beats say anything intelligible about painting. If I'm wrong, show it to me. Clement Greenberg—did he ever talk about the Beat writers? I don't think he would have stooped to that. Or Harold Rosenberg. I used to see Rosenberg all the time, and listen and listen to him. It wasn't something I thought about then, but I don't

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remember him ever talking about these writers. I used to drive him up to East Hampton with Elaine de Kooning. I don't remember her ever talking about Kerouac. As I say, I don't think they even knew the Beats existed. That doesn't mean that one is more important than the other. But to put them all in one place, to me sort of spoils it. The Abstract Expressionists were an extremely interesting, exciting group. The same with the Beats. But if you just mush them together, what you've done is lose both.

INTERVIEWER

Certainly the Beats, the Pop Artists and the Abstract Expressionists did complement each other when they were brought together inside *Evergreen Review.*

ROSSET

But that wasn't them. That was us. We saw the connections that they didn't see.

INTERVIEWER

What did the Beat thing mean to you?

ROSSET

To me, it was writing that came out of Henry Miller. Of course, Miller didn't recognize them, either. He refused to. But the writers—Kerouac, especially, and Ginsberg—they had the same free spirit as Miller. They were a way of living, like Miller was. On the road, literally. That spirit. They reflected a feeling of the times that was antagonistic to the academy and the powers that be, as had been Miller. Sure, they were that way for very different reasons, but they were, nevertheless. That brought in a certain amount of gay people, like Ginsberg. You could relate that to Walt Whitman, whom you could relate to Miller. It was pretty much of a line.

INTERVIEWER

How did you first became aware of the Beat writers?

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ROSSET

I'm sure it was through Don Allen. Don saw this outpouring of new writing coming from San Francisco. It really was a San Francisco scene. We devoted the second issue of *Evergreen Review* to those writers, like Ginsberg, Snyder, Kerouac—though very few of them were really San Franciscans.

Allen Ginsberg, Gregory Corso and Barney Rosset in Washington Square Park, 1957.

INTERVIEWER

Whose idea was that issue?

ROSSET

Basically Don's. Of course, I knew about the City Lights edition of Ginsberg's *Howl* being banned. We printed *Howl* in the issue, but because the court case was still going on we used an expurgated version. We also already knew Kenneth Rexroth, who was a Henry Miller fanatic, so he was in it. Grove got a lot of writers out of that issue. We became, in a way, the official publishers of the Beat Generation.

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INTERVIEWER

The second issue of *Evergreen Review*, in 1957, was the first national publication of the Beats as a group.

ROSSET

We were hardly a major national publication. We printed maybe five thousand copies, then went back to press and printed maybe another five thousand. At a loss. We sold the magazine for a dollar, and it was very expensively done. There was a beautiful section of black and white photographs of the poets sewn into the binding.

INTERVIEWER

Was it ever your intent to publish a little literary magazine, in the tradition of the small literary quarterlies that supported the work of the previous generation of modernist writers, like Pound and Joyce?

ROSSET

That may have been Don Allen's concept. But if you look at the first issue, it never really came to be. We did Sartre and Beckett—okay, that might fit. But Baby Dobbs, jazz drummer? Don was quite academic. He made people like Frank O'Hara and Kerouac and Ferlinghetti academic. I mean, he made it possible for the academy to accept them. When you look in his anthology, *The New American Poetry*, which we published, you can see his influence. That book became the standard, the landmark book, and it sold and sold. It taught poetry to a whole generation of young kids. He established schools of poets with that book, you can see it in the table of contents. He wanted to create a new academy.

INTERVIEWER

If you were to say, "This is the essence of the Beat Generation," what would it be?

ROSSET

Well, to me, it was two writers. Kerouac and Ginsberg.

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INTERVIEWER

Not Burroughs?

ROSSET

Well, no. Burroughs was so special by himself, very special in a literary sense. The heart and soul of the Beats were Ginsberg and Kerouac: Kerouac, the heart, and Allen, the brain. Allen was the organizer, the conceptual person who guided it. He took care of everybody. He was the shepherd of the flock, in a sense, and some of the sheep were, you know, Burroughs, Kerouac, McClure. It wasn't easy to keep those people in the same line, believe me. You had to be a sheepdog to go around and find Corso or whomever. Allen molded things, like Burroughs. I mean, he brought Burroughs's manuscript of *Naked Lunch* in the door one day.

INTERVIEWER

What do you mean, he brought it in the door?

ROSSET

It was a big manuscript. We were committed to doing *Naked Lunch*, but we kept stalling because it was insane to go into the face of the wind with that book when we hadn't yet won on *Tropic of Cancer.* Burroughs would have been much harder to defend than Miller. You could make a case that Henry Miller was an established twentieth-century writer—especially after the *Lady Chatterley* case. But Burroughs was much wilder, and nobody had ever heard of him. Lawrence had set the stage for Miller, in a sense, and Miller set the stage for Burroughs. But at the time we signed the contract for *Naked Lunch*, we still hadn't won anything. We were right in the middle of *Chatterley.* Had we just gone ahead and published Burroughs it would have been a mess because we already had so many lawsuits.

INTERVIEWER

What was it that attracted you to the manuscript of *Naked Lunch*?

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ROSSET

I think it's a work of genius, especially the part about the Dr. Benway character. Now, when you read it, it sounds almost coherent. But back then, well . . . it was like looking at an abstract painting. No one had ever seen anything like it before. Reading that book was *something*. It was the way that he turned the language and concepts around, using a good figure, a doctor, to send up the whole society. Of course Burroughs had strong concepts about all kinds of drugs, you know, whether they were good or bad, and also how to break your habit. That was very special to him. I can't imagine Kerouac being too involved in that particular kind of thing.

INTERVIEWER

Do you remember first meeting Burroughs?

ROSSET

I remember being around him in the sixties, in Paris and in New York. He was very quiet, sort of strange. Severe.

INTERVIEWER

Severe?

ROSSET

I remember a party that Ted Morgan gave for him, about fifteen of us there. Burroughs didn't say a word. And then suddenly, apropos of nothing, he stood up and put his finger to his head like a pistol. He said, "I don't see how people can shoot themselves in the head. All that blood." Obviously I never saw him with a real gun, shooting apples off heads or whatever . . . ! He had a very midwestern posture, almost T.S. Eliot-like. I did not think of him as in any way related to somebody like Kerouac. Kerouac was relaxed—as a person more like the painters. Burroughs was very stiff. Ginsberg was always quite calm, more and more expert at his metier. If you saw him in the beginning, he was just learning. But he kept

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on the same track, and he didn't go against what he did. In other words, he never said, "Oh, I was a young kid then," and drop it. He developed through the years in a natural way. Kerouac didn't last too long at being good. There were not too many years at the top. Some of the things he wrote later were really, I think, quite inferior. The last years of his life he sort of fell to pieces, and he became very angry at his book publishers, who we *weren't* by then. Thank God. I think Farrar, Straus took him on. He also had become violently anti-Semitic. He used to call me at my home in East Hampton and tell me how he hated the Jews. He'd complain about Roger Straus, or about his other publishers. To him they were all Jews . . . the Jews were after him.

INTERVIEWER

And he called *you*?

ROSSET

All the time. I'd listen to this and I'd say, "Yeah, right, yes," just hoping that he'd stay at the phone and not come and see me! Listen, I'm sure it didn't bother Allen Ginsberg, and it didn't bother me. His anti-Semitism wasn't personal. I just couldn't get him off the phone. I could be totally wrong, but he seemed to me to have a lot of violence in him, just beneath the surface. Just a little. I don't know if that was true, but it was the way he looked. I was a little afraid of him. He'd been involved in some sort of a murder scandal at Columbia University, which I was very aware of. He had a football smashed face. He looked tough. I did have one marvelous day with him. Claude Gallimard came to New York—they were publishing Kerouac—and like all French tourists they wanted to see the American beatnik. So Gallimard and two or three other people from his publishing company came to our house on Eleventh Street to meet Jack—and his mother. With his mother around, Jack behaved like a little prince. She played the piano and sang songs in French—God knows what Gallimard thought about that! Jack drank lemonade. It went

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off beautifully. I remember walking out the door with him—I wanted to get him out of there before something happened—and he said to me, "Hey I carried that off pretty well, didn't I?" "Yeah, you did, thanks." And I meant it—*thank you*!—I was scared.

INTERVIEWER

Would it be possible today to start an *Evergreen Review*?

ROSSET

I don't know. There was a disaffection in the society in the fifties, as there is today. But people like the Beats, though they were disaffected, were charged with energy about it. Even Beckett was, in his own way, as was Ionesco. Now there's a malaise, but there doesn't seem to be anything creative happening in response to it.

INTERVIEWER

In 1964, *Evergreen* changed format from a trade paperback to a regular, glossy magazine. Why did you decide to go to the larger size?

ROSSET

We wanted more attention. More distribution, more readers, more advertising. But the first issue we did like that was confiscated by the district attorney in Nassau County. That was a kind of discouraging first step. I don't know how many copies got out of Nassau County alive.

INTERVIEWER

Why was it confiscated?

ROSSET

It was seized because of photographs I had brought back from Paris, pictures of nudes by Emil Cadoo that we printed in the issue. We also used one for the cover. They're beautiful photos, and now they would be given a PG rating. They're

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very cloudy, and you'd have to have a fair amount of imagination and ingenuity to see anything happening in them. But the district attorney apparently did. He came from a place appropriately named Hicksville, Long Island. The issue was printed there, and it was all ready to be bound, but a woman who worked there had a husband who was a detective for the vice squad. She went home to him and reported this terrible stuff that we were publishing, and it all ended up in the district attorney's office. They took all the copies to the police station, unbound. It was a mess. That issue was never bound properly. So Cy Rembar, who was one of our lawyers, started a lawsuit using a rarely used law from 1898 against the district attorney, personally, for arresting us. And it worked. He finally said, "Leave me alone and I'll leave you alone."

INTERVIEWER

That issue of *Evergreen*, number 32, has fiction by Norman Mailer, Jean Genet, Burroughs, Ionesco and Robert Musil, poems by Günter Grass, Michael McClure and Lenore Kandel, and a play by Rolf Hochhuth. Pretty impressive lineup.

ROSSET

The change in format did not change the tenor of the magazine—except that we added the photographs, in color. I felt that there ought to be a larger audience for what we were doing. We'd reached a plateau in circulation in the small size, about 20,000 an issue, and nothing we did managed to break through that ceiling. I felt that the small size was a format that limits you to a particular audience. The trade-paperback format worked in the beginning, because we were able to confuse bookstores as to what we were. We were treated as both a book and a magazine—we got the best of both worlds. But it kept us within a certain circle. With the large format, circulation eventually grew to over 150,000. Then with the next issue, number 33, we had another problem with a printer. We published a poem by Julian Beck that ended with the line, "Fuck the USA." They wanted us to take the line out.

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We said, would it be all right if it read "Fuck the Soviet Union?" They said sure—a very good example of what we were up against at the time. Probably if the poem said, "I don't like the United States," that would have been all right. "Fuck the Soviet Union" was all right. But to put the two together . . . ! We lost that printer. We kept losing printers, one after another.

INTERVIEWER

Aside from the Julian Beck poem, that issue has fiction by John Fowles and Kerouac, excerpts from Jakov Lind's *Soul of Wood* and Brautigan's *Trout Fishing in America*, a piece by Michael O'Donahue, Jan Kott's essay "King Lear or Endgame," and an essay on writing for the theater by Harold Pinter. You also included some of the Cadoo photos from the previous issue with a paragraph about the confiscation of the magazine by the Nassau County DA. After having problems with one printer, you went to another printer and published the same photographs!

ROSSET

That is *very* funny! We thought we'd try it again! We used the occasion to say this is what we did last time and what got them upset. The new printer was willing to print the photos, but not the poem! We published it anyway.

INTERVIEWER

Though Grove started out primarily as a literary publisher, over time the company did more books of an overtly political nature, like Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* and *The Autobiography of Malcolm X.*

ROSSET

Fanon was published by a very left-wing, radical French publisher, who we bought it from. It was a more important book for Africa, Algeria in particular, more than here. I mean, people here had a lot of terrible problems and poverty, but nothing like in Africa.

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Emil Cadoo

One of the censored Cadoo photographs

INTERVIEWER

The black nationalists sure took it up.

ROSSET

Far more than Martin Luther King. The Black Panthers, definitely. It was a revolutionary book. Malcolm X, though, I don't know. He wasn't political in that socialist way. Malcolm X was very revolutionary when it came to the treatment of black people in this country, and so on, but I don't think he had Fanon's kind of insight about political organizing and economic analysis. I wonder if Malcolm X ever heard of Fanon. I doubt it. No, his movement got translated into Muslim practice. That never impressed me as being brilliant politically. It still doesn't.

INTERVIEWER

Didn't Grove acquire *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* after he had been assassinated?

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ROSSET

The book was already in galleys when we got it. Doubleday was the original publisher, but they gave it up. In the paper, Nelson Doubleday said, "I don't want my secretaries to be killed because of this book." We paid twenty thousand dollars not to Doubleday, but to Alex Haley. I don't think Haley would have let any money slip away from him.

INTERVIEWER

What was it about Malcolm X's book that attracted you to it?

ROSSET

Malcolm X got assassinated, that's number one. He was a renegade who had something very interesting to say—powerful social comments to make about poverty and our government. The book is brilliant. Of course, he was much less of an establishment figure than he is now. In those days he was really a fringe person. Now he is a saint. He was a very exciting figure, very articulate. At the time he made that one terrible statement, though now in retrospect it doesn't seem so off base. When Kennedy was assassinated he said, "The chickens have come home to roost." Then it sounded awful—nasty and violent. But it was true. All the enemies that Kennedy created came back to haunt him. And it happened to Malcolm X, too. He was almost assassinated at least once before. His house was burned down. He was living in constant danger.

INTERVIEWER

Aside from publishing black nationalists like Fanon and Malcolm X, Grove was also doing books by Che Guevera and Fidel Castro.

ROSSET

Fanon didn't write anything for us. He'd written a little masterpiece, but we got a book that was already done. With Che and Castro it wasn't so easy. I mean, there you had to be inventive.

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INTERVIEWER

Inventive in what way?

ROSSET

Well, Fred Jordan and I flew to the mountains of Bolivia in search of Che's diaries after he was assassinated. Everyone was trying to get that diary, including the CIA. We got a tip from the Cuban delegate to the UN. Eventually we found some pages in Cochabomba and published them in *Evergreen* in a whole issue dedicated to the spirit of Che. Paul Davis did a painting of Che for the cover; we made a poster of it and put it all over New York, in the subway and at bus stops. It was everywhere. That aggravated the anti-Castro Cubans and, I think, led directly to the bombing of Grove.

INTERVIEWER

The bombing of Grove?

ROSSET

One night in 1968 there was a series of bombings, ten or eleven, by a group who identified themselves as anti-Castro Cubans. They blew up Japan Air Lines, the Canadian Consulate, and they thought they'd blown up the apartment of the UN delegate from Cuba—except they got the wrong apartment. We were one of the targets. I met a guy who lived across the street from Grove and actually saw it happen. In the middle of the night some people drove past the office in a pickup truck and launched a rocket through the second floor window. Pow! Better than the Bay of Pigs! They caught the guys who did it, and it turned out that they were all reserve officers in the American Air Force who had also had been working for the CIA at one time or another. So at the trial the judge announced, "These are good people, they never did anything before." He let them go.

INTERVIEWER

When did you hear about the bombing?

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ROSSET

Shortly after it happened. Early in the morning I got a phone call from my secretary. She was the first one to go to the office. The police were the only ones in the building before her. She noticed a stab wound in the Paul Davis Che poster on the first floor. The police did that, not the Cubans. The Cubans just drove by; they didn't stop.

INTERVIEWER

What was it about Che and Castro that you thought was worth the risk?

ROSSET

I liked what they were doing. They were anticolonialists at a very high level; they were romantic figures. . . . As if Kerouac had been political, let's say. Later Fidel double-crossed me with his puritanism . . . when he went into the homophobe thing. That was terrible. And Che left, you know. It's one thing when you're on the outside fighting for the revolution, it's another thing entirely when you've won. After they took power, Che had to leave Cuba; there was no place for him. He left and went up into Bolivia, into *Bolivian* you might say. That's a pun. Even so, I think what Castro did, with all the ups and downs, was quite marvelous. And it still is. The insanity of this country not to be able to surmount a few fanatics in Miami. It is tragic.

INTERVIEWER

In the sixties, Grove also did many New Left and counterculture books, like how to dodge the draft, books about drugs. Mass-market paperbacks.

ROSSET

We found ourselves immersed in an audience, right? It was suddenly more saleable, or commercial. It was a part of the times. The flood was on our side for a moment. I keep thinking of that wonderful photo of Burroughs, Allen and our editor Dick Seaver at the Chicago convention in 1968, amongst all

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those goddamn cops! The people I had at Grove were hardly against me. We were pretty much on the same course.

Jean Genet, William Burroughs and Allen Ginsberg at the Chicago Democratic Convention. Not long after this picture was taken, the police broke up the march. Genet fled down a street, the police in pursuit, and in desperation knocked on the door of a townhouse. The door opened, and a man said, "Oh, Jean Genet. Come on in. I'm writing my thesis on you."

INTERVIEWER

As the sixties progressed, Grove published quite a lot of writing and art that was influenced by psychedelics.

ROSSET

To me that was a sideline phenomenon. It didn't intrigue me quite as much as it did others in the company. Certainly, it was of very great importance to Burroughs and Ginsberg,

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so that was of interest. I did not like Timothy Leary. He made psychedelics into a religious thing. I admired Leary for escaping from jail in California. That was his high moment to me! I would have helped him do that. Nothing else. I was outside of it. But not outside of *taking* drugs, if somebody gave them to me. I took LSD, which I didn't like.

INTERVIEWER

When was that?

ROSSET

The very early sixties. Allen Ginsberg and Timothy Leary gave LSD to me and a woman friend of mine. I'd never met Leary before, or really even heard of him. They came to my place on Eleventh Street—Leary, Allen and his friend Peter Orlovsky. Leary gave us this big handful of pills. Well, I suppose we didn't have to take them . . . but he was from Harvard. He seemed kind of respectable. At that time acid wasn't that well-known. I'd heard of it, but I didn't know anything about it. But it had an *effect*, I'll tell you. My apartment had two floors, and the three of them went upstairs and turned on African music and danced while my friend and I became paranoid. We backed into the corner of the room we were in. We couldn't figure out what was happening. Joan's paintings kept coming out of the wall, and I'd go and push them back into the wall! But my friend was in a state of terror. Then Allen came to us, and he told us something that night I have never forgotten: he taught me how to throw up. It was fantastic. I had an absolute phobia about throwing up, and ever since that night I can throw up on command. It doesn't bother me at all. He taught me how to relax, that throwing up is not a bad thing. He coaxed and coaxed, to get rid of some of the LSD. And it worked.

The next day I went to Grove Press, and when I came back to the apartment my friend was lying unconscious in a big pool of blood in the living room. She had tried to commit suicide—slit her wrists with a razor. Thank God she was still breathing. So I picked her up, got her upstairs. The building

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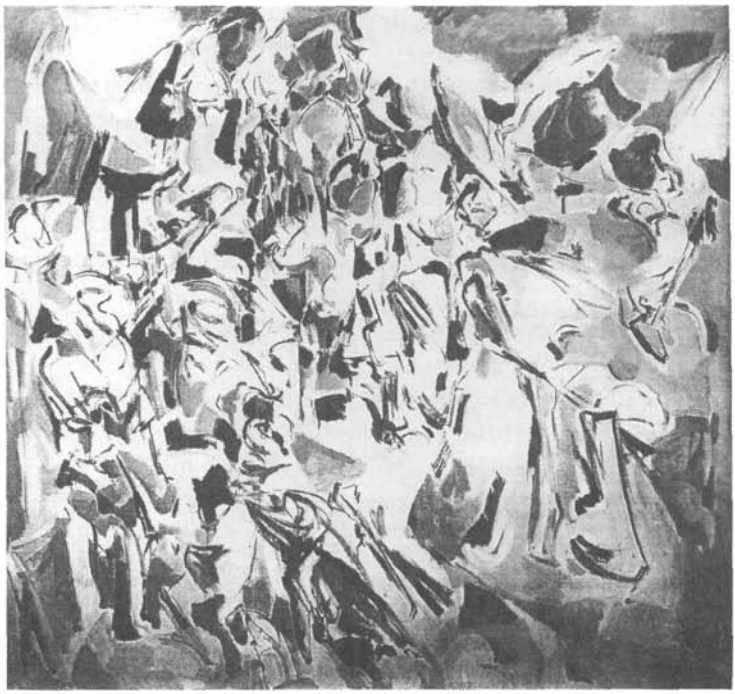
had four floors. Fred Praeger, the publisher, was my tenant—he had the other two floors. Praeger was an acknowledged CIA agent. He was coming down the stairs with this guy in a black suit and a white handkerchief in his pocket. I said, "Can I borrow that?" I made a tourniquet from his handkerchief. St. Vincent's Hospital was one block away, thank God, and I got her there. It took them three hours to sew her up.



The Mitchell painting out of which came the shapes that terrified Rosset when he took LSD with Leary.

INTERVIEWER

What an insane experience.

ROSSET

Afterwards Leary said it was my fault because I hadn't guarded her for seventy-two hours or something. So he takes

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her to Massachusetts—and he tried to get married to her! She would call me and say, "I don't know if I should marry Leary." I'd say, "Don't do it!" He convinced her that her bad experience was my fault, that I didn't nurture her properly and create the right environment for her. Then I got a letter from him with all these questions about the LSD. It had questions like, after you took the LSD did you feel (a) 10 percent better, or (b) 20 percent better, and so on. How did this affect your religious feelings? Did you have more of a feeling of God? I was so infuriated that I gave it to somebody I knew from Harvard Medical School, a psychiatrist. He said, after reading it, "I am ashamed to be associated with Harvard!" Shortly after that they threw Leary out.

INTERVIEWER

How did Grove get involved with Abbie Hoffman and *Steal This Book*?

ROSSET

Jerry Rubin's girlfriend, Nancy Kurshan, used to work for us at *Evergreen*. Abbie at that point had done a couple of pieces for *Evergreen Review*, and so had Jerry, I think. I never really liked either of them. Coming from an orthodox political standpoint, I distrusted the Yippie idea. I felt they were making use of the moment to a very strong degree. To me, Allen Ginsberg was real, as were Kerouac and others. But I always thought that Abbie and Jerry were somehow using the political climate to suit themselves, though certainly with a great deal of dash, talent, fervor and madness. They were the cream, the froth at the top of the wave, but I really never trusted them.

INTERVIEWER

Then why did you publish them?

ROSSET

Abbie brought us *Steal This Book* because, though Random House had been publishing him and were happy to have him

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as an author, they wouldn't publish *Steal This Book.* I made a point to never look at that book. I never opened it. To me, if Random House wouldn't publish it, that was enough: we would do it. We arranged with him that he'd publish it himself and we would distribute it. There was a moral imperative for us to do something because here was a guy fighting for the things that we believed in, and he was being censored by his publisher.

INTERVIEWER

Did you have problems getting the book into bookstores?

ROSSET

Well, at that time Grove Press was actually being distributed by Random House. Abbie called his publishing company Pirate Editions—the spine of his book was a picture of Random House being blown apart. So obviously we couldn't distribute it that way. We had to make deals with other distributors and give them an extra 10 percent discount. Because people *did* steal the book. It wasn't exactly popular with the conservative elements of our society. Also, it had instructions about how to make Molotov cocktails.

INTERVIEWER

In 1976, Vice President Nelson Rockefeller headed up a government commission to investigate covert domestic operations by the CIA against perceived enemies of the U.S. government. When the report was issued, Grove Press was sited as one of the principal targets. Wasn't Grove one of the only commercial businesses targeted by the COINTELPRO program?

ROSSET

Yes. So we tried to get our files under the Freedom of Information Act. Ultimately we got something like ten thousand pages of documents. In the process we discovered that they had found another Fred Jordan, in Illinois or somewhere. It was a case of mistaken identity. They had the two mixed

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up. Then they found another Rosset, who was also in the Communist Party during World War II, if you can believe that. Whatever I did was bad enough, but they also added to it what this other guy did.

INTERVIEWER

When did the FBI begin keeping files on you?

ROSSET

At college. I was one of those "Jewish radicals" at UCLA, which is where I went after I left Swarthmore. They had my files from my grade school in Chicago, Frances Parker. Once I was asked the question who is the most important person in the world? I was twelve years old. I said Benito Mussolini. I had read a book called *Sawdust Caesar*, which was very anti-Mussolini. I wrote to the author, George Seldes, a few years ago and told him: do you know all the trouble you caused me? They carried that statement in my files for fifty years. They were trying to say I was pro-fascist. Then, during the war, I had trouble getting into officer's training school because they thought I was a Communist. They also thought I was a Japanese spy. They couldn't decide!

INTERVIEWER

Why did they think you were a spy for Japan?

ROSSET

Because I knew two girls from my high school who were half-Japanese—both married to people in the American armed forces, I might add. The FBI said that I consorted with "Japanese whores."

INTERVIEWER

You got in the Army nonetheless and while there you studied film, and after the war you produced a feature film, *Strange Victory*. So there was a natural connection between your early interests and when Grove began to distribute films.

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ROSSET

We had a collection of important, avant-garde films that nobody else had, which started when I bought Cinema 16 in the early sixties. Maya Daren, Stan Brackhage—we had all his stuff. Some Kenneth Anger. We had Jack Smith's *Flaming Creatures*. And a film by Genet, the only film I know of that he made, and it's marvelous. Actually, that film lost before the Supreme Court. It is still theoretically illegal to this day. Many, many films. We had a couple of Lenny Bruce's movies, Godard's *Weekend*, some great Czech films.

INTERVIEWER

But the biggest success was definitely *I Am Curious (yellow)*. How did you come across it?

ROSSET

During the Frankfurt book fair, I read an article in the Manchester *Guardian* about this Swedish film, *I Am Curious (yellow)*. I thought, That's for us, how do we get it? So Christine, my wife, and I got on a plane from Frankfurt. I bought it right there on the spot for a hundred thousand dollars. That was a lot in those days.

INTERVIEWER

Knowing full well that this film was going to have trouble when it got to the U.S.

ROSSET

Right. But it was serious—about class struggle in Sweden, and about women's rights. Supposedly it had a lot of sex in it. Male frontal nudity. It's about a young girl whose father was in the civil war in Spain—the only thing he ever did in his life. She's doing a study of classism in Sweden, and she decides that the upper class in Sweden are as bad as they've ever been—terrible. Her boyfriend exploits her, and she practically kills him. She's running her own, sad, little world. That's what it's about. And it's not very happy—there is some sex in it, but I mean . . . very little.

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INTERVIEWER

But that's what got everyone's attention.

ROSSET

I suppose! It was another one of those things. People showing it ended up arrested all over the country. We had to go from state to state, again. When our case came up before the Supreme Court, Justice Douglas, whom we once published in *Evergreen*, excused himself. The decision was four to four, which meant that the old decision, which we lost, stood. To this day it's against the law to show *I Am Curious (yellow)*. But by that time the question was moot, because we'd already shown the movie in every major city in the country.

INTERVIEWER

You must have made a lot of cash from that film.

ROSSET

I Am Curious (yellow) was a big success. But it was a disaster for us in many ways. Because we made a lot of money, I went and bought a lot of foreign films—which were no longer commercially viable because all the art theaters had closed down, overnight, in 1970. They had started showing X-rated porno films. There had been a big market for foreign films in this country, and suddenly it was gone. After *I Am Curious (yellow)* played, that was the end. We killed our own market.

INTERVIEWER

And Grove had put a lot of money in European films?

ROSSET

Hundreds of thousands. How did I know there wouldn't be a market there the next day? We had destroyed it! And there was no VCR. No cassettes. And no theaters. But we had all the fucking films.

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INTERVIEWER

Between the mid-fifties and the late sixties, Grove had grown quite large.

ROSSET

Well, when Fred Jordan came Grove was four people, including the accountant. Fred started doing business and sales, but I couldn't constrain him to that. He leaped over to editorial, sort of imperceptively. When I hired Dick Seaver to be an editor in 1959, there still weren't many people. Dick was also very important to the company. But by this time we had about three hundred people. We had a book club, a warehouse, a film department. We moved into this huge building on Mercer Street. We had a special executive elevator.

INTERVIEWER

Pretty exclusive.

ROSSET

We lost touch with the masses. I'm only half joking. The whole thing was not for real. It was an unreal time.

INTERVIEWER

That feeling of unreality must have grown throughout the sixties, as the underground became more popular and drugs became so much a part of the scene.

ROSSET

Yes, it did. We had our book club in a place on Varick Street. When you walked in you knew that half of the people working there were turned on. Over on Hudson Street, in the warehouse, we had people stealing more books than we were shipping. Even the union allowed us to hire detectives! It didn't help. They were taking them out in truckloads. We finally had to give the warehouse up. Not long after that we had to let almost everybody go.

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INTERVIEWER

Surely, considering the content of both the books and films you must have had problems with the feminist movement?

ROSSET

One morning I was with Fred in Copenhagen. I got on the phone with my secretary. I said, "How are things?" "I'm not in your office today. I'm one floor down." Oh, why? "Well, your office is occupied by all these women." It was the height of Women's Lib. They demanded that we build a child-care center, and that we pay a royalty from our erotic "Anonymous" titles to the prostitutes of New York City!

INTERVIEWER

Did they do any physical damage?

ROSSET

Well, they broke up the furniture, but who cares? In fact, in court they claimed they did more damage than they actually did! They *wanted* to go to jail. In order to get them off we had to say they didn't do anything. This was Cy Rembar's finest hour. He fought to get them off, though we were supposed to be the prosecution. First, we arrested them, then told the cops to let them go—cops don't like that.

INTERVIEWER

Many people like to think of publishing as a gentleman's profession. Obviously you saw Grove differently. It was much more confrontational and took risks, financial and otherwise, that other publishers wouldn't take. You never thought of Grove as a publishing company in the way that people thought of Knopf or Random House?

ROSSET

No. And neither did they. Neither did the Knopfs or Random Houses think of us that way.

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INTERVIEWER

How did they think of Grove?

ROSSET

Bennet Cerf, of Random House, was extremely cordial and friendly. But Alfred Knopf was hostile. He thought we weren't in the same class with him. When I say class, I mean what's thought of as class in society. He came from what he considered a great aristocracy of wealth and tradition and so on, and we hardly fit in. When he did *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, he expurgated it. Over my dead body would I have done that. And Knopf didn't appreciate that, you know. Robert Bernstein, then president of Random House, I think, said of Grove . . . well, he was speaking of me. He said I was a maverick. Not in the mainstream. He was right.

—**Ken Jordan**

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Flying Carpets

Steven Millhauser

In the long summers of my childhood, games flared up suddenly, burned to a brightness, and vanished forever. The summers were so long that they gradually grew longer than the whole year, they stretched out slowly beyond the edges of our lives, but at every moment of their vastness they were drawing to an end, for that's what summers mostly did: they taunted us with endings, marched always into the long shadow thrown backward by the end of vacation. And because our summers were always ending, and because they lasted forever, we grew impatient with our games, we sought new and more intense ones; and as the crickets of August grew louder, and a single red leaf appeared on branches green with summer, we threw ourselves as if desperately into new adventures, while the long days, never changing, grew heavy with boredom and longing.

I first saw the carpets in the back yards of other neighborhoods. Glimpses of them came to me from behind garages, flickers of color at the corners of two-family houses where clotheslines on pulleys stretched from upper porches to high

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gray poles, and old Italian men in straw hats stood hoeing between rows of tomatoes and waist-high corn. I saw one once at the far end of a narrow strip of grass between two stucco houses, skimming lightly over the ground at the level of the garbage cans. Although I took note of them, they were of no more interest to me than games of jump rope I idly watched on the school playground, or dangerous games with jackknives I saw the older boys playing at the back of the candy store. One morning I noticed one in a back yard in my neighborhood; four boys stood tensely watching. I was not surprised a few days later when my father came home from work with a long package under his arm, wrapped in heavy brown paper, tied with straw-colored twine from which little prickly hairs stuck up.

The colors were duller than I had expected, less magical—only maroon and green: dark green curlings and loopings against a maroon that was nearly brown. At each end the fringes were thickish rough strings. I had imagined crimson, emerald, the orange of exotic birds. The underside of the carpet was covered with a coarse, scratchy material like burlap; in one corner I noticed a small black mark, circled in red, shaped like a capital *H* with a slanting middle line. In the back yard I practiced cautiously, close to the ground, following the blurred blue directions printed on a piece of paper so thin I could see my fingertips touching the other side. It was all a matter of artfully shifted weight: seated cross-legged just behind the center of the carpet, you leaned forward slightly to send the carpet forward, left to make it turn left; right, right. The carpet rose when you lifted both sides with fingers cupped beneath, lowered when you pushed lightly down. It slowed to a stop when the bottom felt the pressure of a surface.

At night I kept it rolled up in the narrow space at the foot of my bed, alongside old puzzle boxes at the bottom of my bookcase.

For days I was content to practice gliding back and forth about the yard, passing under the branches of the crab-apple trees, squeezing between the swing and ladder of the yellow

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swing set, flying into the bottoms of sheets on the clothesline, drifting above the row of zinnias at the edge of the garden to skim along the carrots and radishes and four rows of corn, passing back and forth over the wooden floor of the old chicken coop that was nothing but a roof and posts at the back of the garage, while my mother watched anxiously from the kitchen window. I was no more tempted to rise into the sky than I was tempted to plunge downhill on my bike with my arms crossed over my chest. Sometimes I liked to watch the shadow of my carpet moving on the ground, a little below me and to one side; and now and then, in a nearby yard, I would see an older boy rise on his carpet above a kitchen window, or pass over the sunlit shingles of a garage roof.

Sometimes my friend Joey came skimming over his low picket fence into my yard. Then I followed him around and around the crab-apple trees and through the open chicken coop. He went faster than I did, leaning far forward, tipping sharply left or right. He even swooped over my head, so that for a moment a shadow passed over me. One day he landed on the flat tar-papered roof of the chicken coop, where I soon joined him. Standing with my hands on my hips, the sun burning down on my face, I could see over the tall backyard hedge into the weed-grown lot where in past summers I had hunted for frogs and garden snakes. Beyond the lot I saw houses and telephone wires rising on the hill beside the curving sun-sparkling road; and here and there, in back yards hung with clotheslines, against the white-shingled backs of houses, over porch rails and sloping cellar doors and the water arcs of lawn sprinklers shot through with faint rainbows, I could see the children on their red and green and blue carpets, riding through the sunny air.

One afternoon when my father was at work and my mother lay in her darkened bedroom, breathing damply with asthma, I pulled out the carpet at the foot of the bed, unrolled it, and sat down on it to wait. I wasn't supposed to ride my carpet unless my mother was watching from the kitchen window. Joey was in another town, visiting his cousin Marilyn, who lived near a department store with an escalator. The thought

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of riding up one escalator and down the next, up one and down the next, while the stairs flattened out or lifted up, filled me with irritation and boredom. Through the window screen I could hear the sharp, clear blows of a hammer, like the ticking of a gigantic clock. I could hear the clish-clish of hedge clippers, which made me think of movie swordfights; the uneven hum of a rising and falling bee. I lifted the edges of the carpet and began to float about the room. After a while I passed through the door and down the stairs into the small living room and big yellow kitchen, but I kept bumping into pots and chair tops; and soon I came skimming up the stairs and landed on my bed and looked out the window into the back yard. The shadow of the swing frame showed sharp and black against the grass. I felt a tingling or tugging in my legs and arms. Dreamily I pushed the window higher and raised the screen.

For a while I glided about the room, then bent low as I approached the open window and began to squeeze the carpet through. The wooden bottom of the raised window scraped along my back, the sides of the frame pressed against me. It was like the dream where I tried to push myself through the small doorway, tried and tried, though my bones hurt, and my skin burned, till suddenly I pulled free. For a moment I seemed to sit suspended in the air beyond my window; below I saw the green hose looped on its hook, the handles and the handle shadows on the tops of the metal garbage cans, the mountain laurel bush pressed against the cellar window; then I was floating out over the top of the swing and the crab-apple trees; below me I saw the shadow of the carpet rippling over grass; and drifting high over the hedge and out over the vacant lot, I looked down on the sunny tall grass, the milkweed pods and pink thistles, a green Coke bottle gleaming in the sun; beyond the lot the houses rose behind each other on the hill, the red chimneys clear against the blue sky; and all was sunny, all was peaceful and still; the hum of insects; the far sound of a hand mower, like distant scissors; soft shouts of children in the warm, drowsy air; heavily my eyelids began to close; but far below I saw a boy in brown shorts looking up at me,

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shading his eyes; and seeing him there, I felt suddenly where I was, way up in the dangerous air; and leaning fearfully to one side I steered the carpet back to my yard, dropped past the swing, and landed on the grass near the back steps. As I sat safe in my yard I glanced up at the high, open window; and far above the window the red shingles of the roof glittered in the sun.

I dragged the heavy carpet up to my room, but the next day I rose high above Joey as he passed over the top of the swing. In a distant yard I saw someone skim over the top of a garage roof and sink out of sight. At night I lay awake planning voyages, pressing both hands against my heart to slow its violent beating.

One night I woke to a racket of crickets. Through the window screen I could see the shadow of the swing frame in the moonlit back yard. I could see the streetlamp across from the bakery down by the field and the three streetlamps rising with the road as it curved out of sight at the top of the hill. The night sky was the color of a dark blue marble I liked to hold up to a bulb in the table lamp. I dressed quickly, pulled out my carpet, and slowly, so as not to make scraping noises, pushed up the window and the screen. From the foot of the bed I lifted the rolled rug. It suddenly spilled open, like a dark liquid rushing from a bottle. The wood of the window pressed against my back as I bent my way through.

In the blue night I sailed over the back yard, passing high over the hedge and into the lot, where I saw the shadow of the carpet rippling over the moonlit high grass. I turned back to the yard, swooped over the garage roof and circled the house at the level of the upper windows, watching myself pass in the glittery black glass; and rising a little higher, into the dark and dream-blue air, I looked down to see that I was passing over Joey's yard toward Ciccarelli's lot, where older boys had rock fights in the choked paths twisting among high weeds and thornbushes; and as when, standing up to my waist in water, I suddenly bent my legs and felt the cold wetness covering my shoulders, so now I plunged into the dark blue night, crossing Ciccarelli's lot, passing over a street, sailing over ga-

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rage roofs, till rising higher I looked down on telephone wires glistening as if wet with moonlight, on moon-greened treetops stuffed with blackness, on the slanting rafters and open spaces of a half-built house crisscrossed with shadows; in the distance I could see a glassy stream going under a road; spots of light showed the shapes of far streets; and passing over a roof close by a chimney, I saw each brick so sharp and clear in the moonlight that I could make out small bumps and holes in the red and ocher surfaces; and sweeping upward with the wind in my hair I flew over moon-flooded rooftops striped with chimney shadows, until I saw below me the steeple of a white church, the top of the firehouse, the big red letters of the five-and-dime, the movie marquee sticking out like a drawer, the shop windows dark-shining in the light of streetlamps, the street with its sheen of red from the traffic light; then out over rows of rooftops on the far side of town, a black factory with lit-up windows and white smoke that glowed like light; a field stretching away; gleaming water; till I felt I'd strayed to the farthest edge of things; and turning back I flew high above the moonlit town, when suddenly I saw the hill with three streetlamps, the bakery, the swing frame, the chicken coop—and landing for a moment on the roof of the garage, sitting with my legs astride the peak, exultant, unafraid, I saw, high in the blue night sky, passing slowly across the white moon, another carpet with its rider.

With a feeling of exhilaration and weariness—a weariness like sadness—I rose slowly toward my window, and bending my way through, I plunged into sleep.

The next morning I woke sluggish and heavy-headed. Outside, Joey was waiting for me on his carpet. He wanted to race around the house. But I had no heart for carpets that day, stubbornly I swung on the old swing, threw a tennis ball onto the garage roof and caught it as it came rushing over the edge, squeezed through the hedge into the vacant lot where I'd once caught a frog in a jar. At night I lay remembering my journey in sharp detail—the moon-glistening telephone wires above their shadow stripes, the clear bricks in the chimney—while through the window screen I heard the chik-chik-chik of crick-

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ets. I sat up in bed and shut the window and turned the metal lock on top.

I had heard tales of other voyages, out beyond the ends of the town, high up into the clouds. Joey knew a boy who'd gone up so high you couldn't see him anymore, like a balloon that grows smaller and smaller and vanishes—as if suddenly—into blue regions beyond the reach of sight. There were towns up there, so they said; I didn't know; white cloud towns, with towers. Up there, in the blue beyond the blue, there were rivers you could go under the way you could walk under a bridge; birds with rainbow-colored tails; ice mountains and cities of snow; flattened shining masses of light like whirling discs; blue gardens; slow-moving creatures with leathery wings; towns inhabited by the dead. My father had taught me not to believe stories about Martians and spaceships, and these tales were like those stories: even as you refused to believe them, you saw them, as if the sheer effort of not believing them made them glow in your mind. Beside such stories, my forbidden night journey over the rooftops seemed tame as a stroll. I could feel dark desires ripening within me; stubbornly I returned to my old games, as carpets moved in back yards, forming bars of red and green across white shingles.

Came a day when my mother let me stay home while she went shopping at the market at the top of the hill. I wanted to call out after her: Stop! Make me go with you! I saw her walking across the lawn toward the open garage. My father had taken the bus to work. In my room I raised the blinds and looked out at the brilliant blue sky. For a long time I looked at that sky before unlocking the window, pushing up the glass and screen.

I set forth high over the back yard and rose smoothly into the blue. I kept my eyes ahead and up, though now and then I let my gaze fall over the carpet's edge. Down below I saw little red and black roofs, the shadows of houses thrown all on one side, a sunny strip of road fringed with sharp-bent tree shadows, as if they had been blown sideways by a wind—and here and there, on neat squares of lawn, little carpets flying above their moving shadows. The sky was blue, pure

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blue. When I next glanced down I saw white puffballs hanging motionless over factory smokestacks, oil tanks like white coins by a glittering brown river. Up above, in all that blue, I saw only a small white cloud, with a little rip at the bottom, as if someone had started to tear it in half. The empty sky was so blue, so richly and thickly blue, that it seemed a thing I ought to be able to feel, like lake water or snow. I had read a story once about a boy who walked into a lake and came to a town on the bottom, and now it seemed to me that I was plunging deep into a lake, even though I was climbing. Below me I saw a misty patch of cloud, rectangles of dark green and butterscotch and brown. The blue stretched above like fields of snow, like fire. I imagined myself standing in my yard, looking up at my carpet growing smaller and smaller until it vanished into blue. I felt myself vanishing into blue. He was vanishing into blue. Below my carpet I saw only blue. In this blue beyond blue, all nothing everywhere, was I still I? I had passed out of sight, the string holding me to earth had snapped, and in these realms of blue I saw no rivers and white towns, no fabulous birds, but only shimmering distances of sky-blue heaven-blue blue. In that blaze of blue I tried to remember whether the boy in the lake had ever come back; and looking down at that ungraspable blue, which plunged away on both sides, I longed for the hardness under green grass, tree bark scraping my back, sidewalks, dark stones. Maybe it was the fear of never coming back, maybe it was the blue passing into me and soaking me through and through, but a dizziness came over me, I closed my eyes—and it seemed to me that I was falling through the sky, that my carpet had blown away, that the rush of my falling had knocked the wind out of me, that I had died, was about to die, as in a dream when I felt myself falling toward the sharp rocks, that I was running, tumbling, crawling, pursued by blue; and opening my eyes I saw that I had come down within sight of housetops, my hands clutching the edges of my carpet like claws. I swooped lower and soon recognized the rooftops of my neighborhood. There was Joey's yard, there was my garden, there was my chicken coop, my swing; and landing in the yard I

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felt the weight of the earth streaming up through me like a burst of joy.

At dinner I could scarcely keep my eyes open; by bedtime I had a temperature. There were no fits of coughing, no itchy eyes, or raw red lines under runny nostrils—only a steady burning, a heavy weariness, lasting three days. In my bed, under the covers, behind closed blinds, I lay reading a book that kept falling forward onto my chest. On the fourth day I woke feeling alert and cool skinned. My mother, who for three days had been lowering her hand gently to my forehead and staring at me with grave, searching eyes, now walked briskly about the room, opening blinds with a sharp thin sound, drawing them up with a clatter. In the morning I was allowed to play quietly in the yard. In the afternoon I stood behind my mother on an escalator leading up to boys' pants. School was less than two weeks away; I had outgrown everything; Grandma was coming up for a visit; Joey's uncle had brought real horseshoes with him; there was no time, no time for anything at all; and as I walked to school along hot sidewalks shaded by maples, along the sandy roadside past Ciccarelli's lot, up Franklin Street and along Collins Street, I saw, in the warm and summery September air, like a gigantic birthmark, a brilliant patch of red leaves among the green.

One rainy day when I was in my room looking for a slipper, I found my rolled-up carpet under the bed. Fluffs of dust stuck to it like bees. Irritably I lugged it down into the cellar and laid it on top of an old trunk under the stairs. On a snowy afternoon in January I chased a Ping-Pong ball into the light-striped darkness under the cellar stairs. Long spiderwebs like delicate rigging had grown in the dark space, stretching from the rims of barrels to the undersides of the steps. My old carpet lay on the crumbly floor between the trunk and a wooden barrel. "I've got it!" I cried, seizing the white ball with its sticky little clump of spiderweb, rubbing it clean with my thumb, bending low as I ducked back into the yellow light of the cellar. The sheen on the dark green table made it look silky. Through a high window I could see the snow slanting down, falling steadily, piling up against the glass.

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Richard Tillinghast

Starfuckers

"Isn't it time I slipped my leash?"
she thought. For him, what was it?
A quickening. A corner he hadn't turned.

Their hands, their eyes, their mouths,
each discreet designer bruise,
pronounced each other's body canonical.

While at the same time knowing
love is the sublimest form of stupidity,
they looked into each other's eyes
as if refining the expression
on a self-portrait.

The way she formed her letters made his breath catch.
The postman was a chubby little cupid.

They were both
starfuckers.

"Your lower lip drives me wild,"
she said in a trattoria.

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Grace Schulman

The Paintings of Our Lives

The Annunciation Altarpiece
Robert Campin, Flemish,
c. 1425, The Cloisters

I.

Through leaded windowpanes the light pours down
less on the holy figures than on objects
waiting to be used that tell the story:
a fringed towel hung askew, a kettle-laver,

unlit wall sconces, the wind-blown pages
of a book laid open on a table,
an empty bench the Virgin leans against
as she sits on the floor reading the Bible

not even noticing the angel Gabriel.
The picture's things, enlarged, furnish this room,
set here as though a great wave had spewed out
details grown to life-sized replicas—

the window, sconces, missal, gleaming kettle,
an untenanted bench roped off in velvet.
Gathered to fit a corner or a shelf,
those imitations lack the painter's order,

his art of reconciling all that varies:
the red of the Virgin's gown, repeated
in a guard's doublet and in Joseph's tunic,
binds one who sees and one who turns away.

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II.

Somewhere are the paintings of our lives
invisible to us—hers, for example,
as she sits fixed on Proust, not looking up.
Across the room, a Knabe grand piano

once played each day stands now, silent for years,
dwarfing her husband's brood of unwound watches,
the marble angel, the Queen Anne chairs,
the porcelain she's never served from, an amber

Tiffany lamp. Unused, the relics shine
like the painter's lily in a jar,
but only in her room, while she says "bronze"
or "jade Buddha" and tells you how it came.

When she gave me a silvery Menorah—
one she'd let darken for its vintage glow—
I rubbed it with a cloth, but it went dull
as a shell that's taken from the sea.

Somewhere an elusive master has revealed
her life's design in oils on three wood panels:
a panoply of objects and a gown
the unifying red of her desires.

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Three Poems by Sidney Wade

"Fuck-me Pumps"

It's the rhythm and small plosive bombs in the mouth,
on the lips of the whisperer (me) who would like
in the best of all possible worlds to rhyme
the phrase to the feet, in the exquisite balance
required by these, in a delicate context
a semiotician could sink his teeth into
(the discourse of mute yet loquacious objects);
in the "u" of the "fuck" and the "u" of the "pump"
there's a congruence pleasing to wayward ears
(of which, let's admit it, we all own a pair),
in the funk of the fancy, the funk of the lump
of the final declarative syllable, the sex
omnipresent, demotic, bejeweled if too,
let's say, loud, in its radiant play, its convex
curve on the screen of the sensate, enhanced
by (a fustian, finally) id, on the lip all the time
of a consummate fall, by a consonant spike
in the pulse of a body that's upright, yet prone to doubt.

What a Gyp

Bliss. Sits bright and bolt and lightening on the pillows
in the bed. The Maharishi said on days
like this one never minds. I'm fond, though, of the wheedle
and the whine, the spotty metaphor. I love a finely
whittled rhetoric as well as sulk and puffery,
the luffing trope, the twang of the diurnal sprawl.
In fact, if I were given the ability

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to transmogrify, I'd turn it down. The yellow
haze that bobbles round the hirsute saints and weighs
a ton is just so many gamma rays, a tidal
wave of repose, thank-you no. A more divinely
shaded prospect lies in wayward words that suffer
time, the dark romance of disappearing, all
flawed and hopeful, flushing with nobility.

Smoking Sonnet

Agnosco veteris vestigia flammae

All ashen-tongued and peacock-eyed, Juno,
the goddess of the marriage bed, the gray
of heart, betrayed a thousand splendid ways
by wedlock in its simpleton cartoon-O,
its frequent want of honor, by the buffoon-O
with clever hands and clever tools (The Roué
in immortal frame), will now sashay
her brilliant bitter self down the ruin-O
of our old bridal path. O Wedded Bliss.
Absurd and gorgeous. Whimpering in the harness.
Impediments lie burning on the ground.
Our mount of little promise steps around
the bones, prepared to navigate the mess,
the contoured bed of smoking artifice.

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Six Poems by Mark Bibbins

Sinking

for Liz

He takes night as a kind of medicine,
swallowing it with a buck and shiver.
Sometimes a drowning must come from within

and spread stealthily out toward the skin
with the drowsy patience of a fever.
He takes night as a kind of medicine,

his blood expanding as the moon goes thin—
its liquid light is something to savor.
Sometimes a drowning must come from within,

where it works like the fingerprint of gin
on the breath of an unfaithful lover.
He takes night as a kind of medicine

and relishes its pliable calfskin
smack, hoping it will blunt him forever.
Sometimes a drowning must come from within.

Finished waiting for the end to begin,
he's a thought in the mind of the river.
He takes night as a kind of medicine—
sometimes a drowning must come from within.

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Legerdemain

You have shown me
that there is no trick

to sawing a person in two,
and that still

the heart hovers
in the space between the boxes

as they are pulled
apart and spun.

Only the heart, lit
by greased light, can see

its image in the mirrors.
Your smile is effortless now

and nearly real. You have others
believing that if you struck

the air with your hand
at just the right angle,

horses would leap forth.
But do this for me instead:

when you are ready
to reassemble my parts,

make me into a centaur,
then feel how the air shakes

as my breath uncoils
restlessly in your ears.

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Counting

While you are sleeping
in a bed tethered to the wall
by the cord
of a nurse's call button,
I count my fingers.
They outnumber the days you have left
to spend in this room,
so I busy them with
arranging the cards
from the people who want you
to be a teddy bear with
a sprained ankle and
get well soon.
Late afternoon sun
shines through the plastic bag
that drips you drops of morphine,
and the light comes out numb
as it swims up the wall.
At the end of her shift
we serve your favorite nurse
a daiquiri in a paper cup.
She props her stockinged feet up
on your bed
and you rub them.
On her right foot,
she has six toes.
She tells us this
was how she learned
to count to twenty-one.
The laughing minutes
fall away from us
like cherry blossoms,
and I want us to
glue them back onto their branches,
but you're sleeping again
and I don't want to wake you.

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The Drowning

for e.e. cummings

When did Alive
become your favorite word?
The day on Silver Lake,
after your canoe capsized
and you had to choose who
would follow it to the bottom?

You must have looked so small
treading hungry water
with Rex and Elizabeth.
The only witness was the hornet
Rex had lunged for, buzzing
safe in lazy circles overhead,

while beneath your feet the boat
sank to be digested
in the black belly of the lake.
And in his panic the dog
kept climbing up on your sister,
a tiny buoy of a girl,

pushing her under
until finally you had to
drown him with the same
strong hands that once combed
for burs through his thick fur
and threw sticks for him to fetch.

You would never have another dog,
and who could question this,
after what happened on the day
that left you wishing for its image
to burst and disappear like the bubbles
of a word gasped underwater.

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Sunburn

There was a time when
his words made me wet with tears:
Ah, our wedding day.

When I was giving
birth, I don't know where he was.
I was suspicious.

I tear choice pages
from books precious to him. This
seems to annoy him.

He comes as quickly
as a sunburn. I forget
and he has finished.

The Parts of This We Remember

For Salaam al-Saidi, who, on April 20, 1995, was stillborn at seven months when citizens of Oklahoma City stoned his parents' house.

Without television, they might have been
no more than stolen coins left
on a railroad track and flattened,

making it difficult to imagine faces
with mouths telling us
that love is not a feeling

but a decision some people don't make—
and heaven is even better than peace.
In a laundromat in Manhattan

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a Korean man stands bewildered
as he stares at his wet clothes
falling in circles behind the glass

like seaweed in a wave,
as if they might have an answer.
The owner of the laundromat is convinced

the Korean man will understand English
if he yells his words and repeats them.
There are men even worse than this

on the radio tonight, telling us
we need tougher immigration laws.
It is hard to think

of a building as being alive
until we see its entrails trying to close
themselves around a wound

and failing. We can almost see
the sky pull back
during the next few days,

affording space in which to die.
Somewhere, an Iraqi woman is driven
through the rooms of her house

by pale, stone-throwing hands
until her premature contractions
push a stillborn son

into the righteous Midwestern air.
No one says: "Bring us a picture
of this baby to put on our news."

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When this, too, becomes mythology,
theologians will argue whether or not
an angel came to whisper in the ears

of people who needed to know:
When you try to count the babies,
one will always be missing.

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Edward Hirsch

Iowa Suite

I. The Vow

We stood in the midst
of a great alluvial plain
and felt the horizon coming
at us like a storm, seeking us out.

We felt the wet land
shuddering under the waves
of an invisible sea, and herds
of buffalo thundering underground.

The sun scorched a hole
in the widest prairie sky
and the rough, whistling, russet—
colored grasses flowed at our knees.

We saw tawny hawks
sailing across the clouds
and wolves storming in packs,
and that's when we closed our eyes

to imagine the wheatfields,
the sod huts and log cabins,
a stone church kneeling down
in the dust of the unspeakable.

It required a steady hand
moving across an empty page.
We would be a single voice
giving names to the bare places.

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II. Ocean of Grass

The ground was holy, but the wind was harsh
and unbroken prairie stretched for hundreds of miles
so that all she could see was an ocean of grass.

Some days she got so lonely she went outside
and nestled among the sheep, for company.
The ground was holy, but the wind was harsh

and prairie fires swept across the plains,
lighting up the country like a vast tinderbox
until all she could see was an ocean of flames.

She went three years without viewing a tree.
When her husband finally took her on a timber run
she called the ground holy and the wind harsh

and got down on her knees and wept inconsolably,
and lived in a sod hut for thirty more years
until the world dissolved in an ocean of grass.

Think of her sometimes when you pace the earth,
our mother, where she was laid to rest.
The ground was holy, but the wind was harsh
for those who drowned in an ocean of grass.

III. Iowa Flora

In Memory of Amy Clampitt

We thought we were having an indigenous childhood
splashed with Indian paintbrush and grassy knolls
thickened by birdfoot violets and ordinary goldenrod,

but we kept finding noxious alien weeds in the hills—
quack grass and thistle, European morning glory
that no state legislation could control.

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We inherited pioneer grasses high as a prairie
schooner, but there were also fresh settlements
of bog flowers and refugees from the sea-

coast marshes, silky-leaved Virginia plants
and Texas marigolds, imported seeds and ornamentals,
weeds from the wasted villages of other continents.

Nature consists of immigrants and mongrels:
you showed us how to prize coincidence and impurity
in wayward fields, the deserted and marginal . . .

I went down to the swamp to mourn for you, Amy,
and it was as if Providence led me to the place
where I stumbled upon yellow swamp betony

and pink foxglove mingled with something nameless
(*unfathomable the mystery before us*, you said)
and the shining, cup-flowered grass of Parnassus.

IV. Homage to Grant Wood

For years, I distrusted his spongy green trees
and curling, cream-colored roads, his toy landscapes
filled with snug farmhouses and well-stocked barns,
the windmills tilting mildly in the midwestern
breeze, the miniature horses and cows, yeomen
in bib overalls gladly doing their daily chores,
housewives in calico aprons putting up preserves,
a boy riding a white mare across a latticed bridge
on a day that never seemed to end, in 1930.
I wanted him to forget the Sears Roebuck catalogue
and to paint the limestone quarry as it appeared—
a scar across the land—and the local banks failing
in the Great Depression (mortgages foreclosed
and farmsteads turned over to insurance companies),
and I chided him for leaving out tractors grinding

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in cornfields and cars roaring up the road to Anamosa.
But this summer when we drove across the state
to haunt the ghost towns that had blown away
in the four winds—Apple Grove and Bellfountaine,
Coalville and Hardscrabble, Incline and Xenia
(Is it true that Phalanx was a socialist commune
and Buxton called "the Negro Athens of the West"?)—
I began to think of him in another light
as a painter with an obstinate faith in the past.
Remember how we drove all day with the windows
open and shouted at trucks passing on the Interstate
and hunted down the *American Gothic* house in Eldon,
and climbed the hill where he had painted Stone City?
I wanted to see the country that he had seen
and that's when I discovered how he had exaggerated
the height to paint a landscape that floated
in his mind, a fantasy of innocence in the garden.
It never quite existed, and yet the low hills
seemed to roll like waves across the striped fields
while the sun loitered for a long time in the treetops
and, standing there with you, overlooking the valley,
I felt a sudden surge of happiness restored.

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Three Poems by Linda Pastan

Fall in the Literary Review

Though we're pages apart this time,
just being in the same issue
is like being at a party together,
you in your semi-formal attire,
me with my ragged lines,
somber again, but willing
to share a drink or two,
even to exchange a literary joke.
And because we won't ever meet,

because the only sheets we'll share
are pages in a magazine,
you don't mind how old I am,
and I don't care what you look like
or if you're married,
as your poem this time implies.
I don't even care who the lucky "you" is
you keep addressing. I like
to think it's me.

March 5

March is the start
of the incontinent season.
My father would have been
one hundred today. Gone

for thirty years, but mysteries
still sprout like weeds

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from his grave soil: the father
in America first, found

in a tenement with an extra wife;
my brother who never lived.
Beneath the scent
of Old Spice aftershave,

I remember a whiff
of steerage, of rotting fruit
from the lower east side,
the infamous restaurant.

Was it the sun reflected from
his cufflinks that made me blink,
or was I afraid to plumb
the silence of that house?

Are leaves simply indifferent
to the tree? I look at my aging
children. Ask me, I want
to tell them. Ask me now.

Carnival Evening

Henri Rousseau, oil on canvas

Despite the enormous evening sky
spreading over most of the canvas,
its moon no more
than a tarnished coin, dull and flat,
in a devalued currency;

despite the trees, so dark themselves,
stretching upward like supplicants,

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utterly leafless; despite what could be
a face, rinsed of feeling, aimed
in their direction,

the two small figures
at the bottom of this picture glow
bravely in their carnival clothes,
as if the whole darkening world
were dimming its lights for a party.

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Splinters

Melvin Jules Bukiet

Half an inch long, an eighth wide, flat as parchment, sharp enough to pierce and pain anyone of mother born, the gray section of wood sat upon an ecclesiastical purple matte between a gold-leafed garland of frame. The catalogue copy with its photograph on the cover read: "Documented, Authenticated Piece of the True Cross, First Sale in Two Thousand Years."

Other religious artifacts were grouped together in Barkeley's annual theological auction: silver kiddush cups that had belonged to Sigmund Freud, African fetishes, a ruby-studded Buddha, an original papal bull, a sheaf of correspondence between Reinhold Niebuhr and Teilhard de Chardin lamenting the discovery of Peking man and celebrating the birth of Niebuhr's daughter and several mosque-size prayer rugs from Mecca. Assembled over the year from many sources, the estimated value of the collection was nearly seven figures without calculating in the priceless designation of the True Cross.

The regulars in Barkeley's grand salon fidgeted nervously. Some reknotted their rep ties, other foraged through Floren-

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tine handbags that bulged as if their material's breadth was presumed to be a reflection of their material depth. These people were accustomed to painting and furniture, rare stamps and coins, property, jewelry and even golden records and pop memorabilia. They laughed when John Lennon's sweaty T-shirt went for sixteen thousand dollars the year before. But no one was laughing now. There was something about this round that made them uncomfortable in their familiar seats, and the characters Lot 78 brought into their domain under Barkeley's domed rotunda were too unsavory for their elite tastes. The odors in the room had clearly not been atomized.

First there were the priests. Traveling in strength for mutual protection from modernity, four of them represented the monastery that was relinquishing its claim to ownership (perhaps *caretakership* was a better word) of this universal treasure in return for a substantial check that stood for another kind of faith. It was their first time in New York or, for that matter, for most of them, out of Sardinia, and they belonged in the elegant surroundings as much as a flock of crows. Dressed in black robes, they were balanced on the opposite side of the room by several Hasidim, who might have been residents of the temporal city, but had never been seen in Barkeley's tony precincts. Wearing jackets and fur-trimmed hats, their beards brushing the glossy cover of the catalogue, the Orthodox Jews were there for the sixteenth-century Torah, and an intricate model of the golem of Prague.

At least a portion of the rank scent drifting among the audience came from a Cypriot gentleman who unwrapped a crinkly wax-paper package containing a liver sandwich and munched contentedly in the front row, while a pale man, Scandinavian Lutheran to judge from his gaunt, albinoid features, sat on the aisle, his long feet extended like crutches. Together with others in the room from more exotic locations beyond identification, they might have inhabited a Mideastern souk more fitly than parlor society.

Barkeley's had always been international in stature and tenor, but the usual foreigners came in discrete waves, the result of historical trends. Japanese tycoons bought art in the

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eighties and German industrialists invested in precious coins when their economy boomed while Australian land barons in the grip of subequatorial social inversion contended against each other for Chipppendale highboys to furnish their vast outback ranches. More recently, the newly prosperous Mafia leaders of Russia had been spotted purchasing letters or documents signed by delegates to the first American Continental Congress. Only time would determine if their investments were wise or whims.

Unlike these waves, the olio on hand for the theological auction was simultaneously too diverse and too concentrated for the regulars to type—not a United Nations but a Divided Faiths. Whereas the Japanese and the Russians seemed to wish to purchase respectability along with objects of value, and the Germans and the Australians had the grace to aspire to Barkeley's definition of class, this crew's concerns only coincidentally overlapped the house's. Their raucous jabber, like a mob down at the docks buying spices in bulk lots from the Levant, showed their uncouth manners. Worse, their criteria for judgment were not temporal, but eternal.

A rotund Nigerian man in a porkpie hat idly flipped through the catalogue's introductory essay, "The Ecstasy of Faith in an Era of Faith in Ecstasy," by Dr. J. Rittenour, Professor of Comparative Religion at Hunter College, extended monograph for sale at Barkeley's office.

The Hasids glanced with irritation at a middle-aged woman in a green blouse who sat next to them. They did not raise their eyes high enough to perceive her coppery red hair or the gold chain that dangled against the pale freckled flesh inside the V of her silk shirt. In the Hasids' homes, as indeed their entire world, the sexes were rigorously separated, but this was neither their home nor their world. They might as well have been in Rome, and had no choice but to do as the Romans. Even if they were inclined to move away, they couldn't; by then every seat in the cavernous room was filled.

One man in the back row tapped impatiently, waiting for the object he had come for to be brought to the rostrum. His

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name was Mark, and so far as he knew he bore no relation to the apostle.

•

A line of credit for the man in the back row had already been arranged, its cap deemed "upon discretion of bidder." Since such designations were rather unusual, his presence had been brought to the attention of the auctioneer through a coded mark on the seating chart that showed the locations of likely ringers.

Forgetting, or choosing to ignore, the years in which his credit was not so excellent, Mark took his distinction in stride. Son of a White Plains dry cleaner, urged but never convinced to believe in a vague suburban Judaism, the sacraments of which were lox and pastrami, Mark had been a mediocre student at Boston University during the late 1960s, where the tastes of the era had led him from drugs to loud music to science-fiction novels about robotic dystopias and time warps. Indeed, it seemed a dystopian time warp when his father simultaneously shook his hand and informed him that the bucks stopped upon receipt of a diploma. Reiterating his dogma once more upon being introduced to Mark's faculty advisor, whose academic gown could have used a good cleaning, the graduate's father said, "I've bought all the books I'm going to."

Summoning the range of worldy skills he had mastered in four years at college, Mark thereafter clerked for the better part of a decade at a used record store in Somerville until he found himself thirty, married, baffled and balding, and returned to science fiction in his spare time, first for escape and then for sustenance. Scribbling nights in the basement of the house he couldn't remember buying, but vividly detested—its proliferating weeds, stuttering boiler, and mortgage—he produced a novel about a world where people were born at thirty and grew younger until they died at birth. Lo and behold, it sold.

Whatever small talent Mark brought to knocking off conceptual, post-apocalyptic thrillers, he was fortunate that there

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seemed to be an insatiable appetite for the genre, which he could, in his own small way, satisfy. His books were brought out by a second-rate San Francisco publisher. They paid him well enough to keep at bay his insufferable and by now, thank God, ex-wife and unpleasant daughter, but not so well as the pirated editions he saw one day cheek by jowl with the UFO section in a New Age bookstore in the Berkshires paid someone else. There, as if captured in one of his own alternate universes, Mark scanned a volume that was unmistakably his long since remaindered *Journey to Eternity* condensed, divested of superfluous plot and rebound with a glowing light on the cover.

Two days later, his attorney from the divorce had filed an injunction against further distribution of the volume as well as a demand for royalties. The latter never did materialize, but the injunction was granted and a new version of *Journey* incorporating the editorial revisions of the spiritual pirates was mailed to a cynical New York literary agent who understood the lure of faith. Republished yet again, the book began to sell under Mark's own name, and, no longer confined to the secretive realm of the plagiarized, it soared from specialty to mainstream bookstores. Under the category of "Inspirational Literature" it simply refused to stop selling, no matter the belated savaging of critics who hadn't deigned to notice it the first time around.

Had *Journey* been the stuff of the author's own soul it might have proved a difficult act to follow, but since Mark was a hack from the get-go, he was able to tailor his vision to a new suit, and came out with four more *Journeys* in quick succession, each one lodging as fiercely as Mont St. Scipelli on its rock on the best-seller lists, and that was just the beginning.

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"Ladies and Gentlemen, please take your seats," the auctioneer announced, and began the patter that would carry them through the long afternoon. In rapid succession he disposed of kiddush cups and Judaica, letters, rugs and bronzes

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until he said, "And now, for the lot you've all been waiting for . . ."

•

Playing with his name, the king of spiritual prose realized that the letters reconfigured also spelled Karma, well nearly, so he eliminated *Journey's* western orientation, retooled the essential core for a different market and tapped into yet another vein of transcendence. This way he gained readers—or, more accurately, adherents—from Back Bay to Bombay.

A writer not so much by as of inspiration, the reminted Mark Karma asked his agent why they bothered to cut in the publisher. He was a brand name; he didn't need any cute animal on the spine to sell his books. He opened his own publishing house and took in other authors under the one eye imprint. Then he cut out the agent.

Unconcerned about the dubious verification of high literary culture, Mark hired preachers, signed them to the kinds of overreaching contracts he had once been subject to, and sent them off to hustle their wares on the road, renting some of the same auditoriums he remembered from his rock 'n' roll days, selling cartons, truckloads, of books and T-shirts and lunchboxes so the believers' children could "take their faith to school."

He purchased a chain of suburban newspapers and some radio licenses and turned them into the print and broadcast venues that *Time* magazine lambasted in a cover story on "The New Religiosity." Allegations of anti-Semitism were hurled at the magazine for referring to The God Network's founder as one "whose head, viewed from the rear, resembles a poppy seed bagel with an unusually large hole."

"Not inaccurate," Mark said, as he searched for more lucrative investments. Why pay the satellite company a transmission fee, he asked his new lawyer, and began negotiations to put his own artificial comet bearing the one eye logo into the astral plane. Then he fired the lawyer who worked by the hour and bought an in-house attorney all for himself. Eventually

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he needed an entire crew of attorneys, all dressed identically in three-piece suits and vests and ties bearing the one eye emblem.

•

"Do I hear fifty thousand dollars to commence the bidding on this remarkable relic from the foundation of Christianity?" The auctioneer caught the eye of the man in the back row. "Yes, I have fifty thousand dollars."

•

Sections and segments of the cross ranging in size from the tiniest chip to enormous planks were treasured in abbeys and monasteries as well as national libraries and private, aristocratic vaults from Lisbon to Istanbul. One huge chunk was in deep storage at the Hermitage, while others were scattered in priestly redoubts as far afield as São Paulo and Cambodia, where a society of Jesuits brought one as their group talisman in the seventeenth century. The joke, attributed to Twain after his European tour, but probably as old as the hills, was that if all these pieces were set together they would form a cross as large as a clipper ship. Healthy or sacrilegious skepticism was the only proper scholarly attitude towards relics.

•

"I have an opening bid of fifty thousand dollars. Do I hear one hundred?"

•

Despite rational disdain, however, these relics had exercised an undeniable fascination for more years than science had been the cult of the West. The relics fell into several categories. First there were the man-made artifacts, such as crucibles and shreds of holy garments, but others were organic, the more

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gruesome the better. Bones and shriveled organs commanded the highest veneration, but toenails of prophets and teeth of saints, locks of hair, and, in one case, a nose, were also worshipped in any church that maintained a claim to antiquity or authority. Nevertheless, in the hierarchical realm of the sanctified, there was nothing to compare with the pieces of the cross itself, and within the realm of cross pieces, there were none to compare with the one from Mont St. Scipelli.

•

Money poured in so swiftly that the Karma Corporation had a difficult time managing its cash flow. Mark purchased other companies, which also gushed income. From publishing and broadcasting, he moved to real estate to railroads and provided venture capital for other innovative young entrepreneurs, until all that was worth Mark's time was to invest in national currencies.

"After all," he said, "the dollar has one eye, too."

Fortunately, this limited vision didn't stop him from shorting the dollar on the Capetown exchange and nearly breaking the Federal Reserve when the notes plunged—at least partially because of his action.

•

"Back to you, Sir. Yes, I have one fifty. Do I hear two hundred?"

•

Then came the more difficult question—what to do with his money? Not charitably minded, not particularly hedonistic, the man needed a hobby. He began to collect, not houses, not horses, not painting; well, some paintings. Not Renoirs of sentimental bourgeois in the garden, and surely not the vulgar expressions and abstractions of his contemporaries, but Titians, Giordanos, El Grecos, portraits of cardinals, saints

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and then, the font of visual artistry in the West, paintings of God in His many incarnations.

"The deity's been good to me," he said.

•

Without a doubt, the particular splinter on the cover of Barkeley's catalogue had been in the possession of the Scipelli brotherhood since the early tenth century, when Julian Despasse, illegitimate son of Henry, Comte de Navarre, Knight Hospitaler, brought it back from Jerusalem. Perhaps he was intending to convey it to Malta, several hundred treacherous nautical miles to the north, but felt mortality boiling inside his swollen blood vessels and delivered it instead to the monastery that sat on a jagged outcropping of volcanic rock on the seaward edge of Sardinia in return for the funeral he required three days later.

Julian's second, unwelcome and invisible gift—plague—nearly decimated the monastery before it ran its decade-long course—or curse. The end of the epidemic was attributed to the mystical curative powers of the piece of the cross its original victim had brought, although perhaps it was blame rather than gratitude the segment of wood deserved.

•

Art went an inch in the direction of satisfying Mark's own inchoate yearnings. He bought madonnas and crucifixion scenes, and then, after a moment of inspiration, he set his two eyes upon the objects which inspired the artists. Discreet inquires about the Holy Grail and the Ark of the Covenant were sent abroad, but the best research revealed those objects to be merely legendary. The only things from the age of faith that indubitably existed in the modern world were the relics. Mark was almost shocked when a Madison Avenue antiques dealer offered him St. Peter's left sandal and intimated that an ankle bone might also be available.

"You mean you can buy this stuff?"

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"With all due respect, Sir, you can buy anything."

"Well, of course. I should have known."

And he plunged in. At first, he bought his share of ankles and fingernails and teeth, and toyed with the idea of attempting to reconstruct Jesus, but was brought up against unfortunate biological lacks—tissues did not endure so well as bone. Besides, the sacred body parts were tainted by the very humanity of their origin. It was the spiritual object nonpareil that lured him. It was the cross.

•

Before Julian had rescued the precious relic during the Crusades, it had been kept safe by an Islamic clan that had received it from an Essene tribe they had obliterated several hundred years earlier. Yet even under the reign of the infidel, the wood had been cherished; in fact, it was the fame of the splinter of Haroun Tell that led Julian to lay siege to its keeper's castle. The siege lasted seventeen months until the besieged had exhausted all the water in their cisterns, all the blood in their horses, and all the meat of their dead. Then when they opened the gate, Julian and his men marched in, and demanded that the heathen leader bow to him. So the Turk abased himself before his captor, and Julian's sword neatly severed his befezzed head.

Alas, Julian was not a visionary. If the conqueror had saved the bloodied repository of Allah consciousness, he might have been able to sell it as a relic to the Arab world, and create a new touristic industry, but instead he threw the wide-eyed, olive-skinned prize to the dogs.

•

The bidding—translated via large-screen monitors into all the major currencies in which the bidders were likely to be proficient—escalated swiftly. The Cypriot threw up his arms in disgust at a quarter of a million and stormed theatrically out of the room, but peeked back in. A further round, to

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300, priced out the taciturn Swede who had been a prominent bidder at the early rounds. Likewise the three-hundred range eliminated all but three bidders, two in the room, and one on the phone.

Rumor swept Barkeley's as to the identity of the bidders. A Saudi sheikh was apparently one; at least he was nodding intently, either bidding or napping. Allegedly the phone was connected to a foundation established by Christendom's wealthiest peer, the owner of a chain of athletic shoe stores in California. The third was clearly a Jew, in the back row.

Mark was slim. He wore corduroy pants and a vest that smelled faintly of tobacco. Sporting a short ponytail with the remains of his hair, he looked rather like the student he had once been, but he had the deep-set eyes and sweeping curve of nostril that made him instantly identifiable to either fellow Jew or Jew-hater, as he waved his fan with the number 18 upwards again and again, making 325 into 350, 425 into 450, and on.

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Leaving a garrison behind to be devoured in turn by heat and disease, Julian boarded ship back to the civilized Christian world he had set off from a half dozen years earlier. All he bore was the precious splinter and a faint swelling in his groin. Flea-bitten and infected, he was welcomed at the harbor of Mont St. Scipelli when he displayed his gift and buried in a sarcophagus in the same nave as the cross itself, a signal honor.

Despite the historical fact that everyone who touched the piece of wood from its first presumed user forward died, the cross was enshrined behind the Sardinian altar. There it remained, the pride of the monastery for a millennium as medieval pilgrims flocked to behold and benefit from its mystical emanations. According to legends as well publicized as the flacks of the era could do with their primitive means, sans fax, the limp walked after viewing the cross, and the dumb spoke. The blind, vouchsafed a precious touch, saw, and a

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thousand other healings for every ailment from leprosy to infertility were claimed for the cross of Mont St. Scipelli.

•

The auctioneer paused to wipe a linen handkerchief across his brow. The bidding had slowed to $25,000 increments, and he thought it was a moment to build suspense to compensate for subsiding momentum. "Do we know," he asked, "how rare and special, how utterly individual a commodity we have here?"

•

Sadly, come modernity, the glamour of the thing began to wane.

Early on, other relics appeared at less inaccessible venues, making the arduous journey to the island fortress less necessary. Disdain their competition as the Scipelli fathers did, make sly insinuations that other fathers in other cellars steeped their ersatz relics in sacramental wine to simulate the patina of blood, their scorn had little effect on the appeal of their rivals. At less guarded moments, the Scipelli brothers might even admit to jealousy of a thorn in the abbey directly across the waters, a day trip by mule from Naples. On the other hand, the faithful who made the seaborne passage were usually better-heeled than the peasants on mules, and therefore more likely to leave some portion of their fortunes to the monastery that inspired them. Scipelli remained one of the richest castles in Christendom for centuries, until faith itself began to lose its appeal.

•

Auctions have patterns, and different people use different strategies. Some bid by regular steps and then jump to frighten the competition. Others lay low, cagily silent until all but one other bidder is out, and then enter the fray, hoping to shock

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and dispirit the one who felt the prize within grasp. As for Mark, he just kept his hand up, and intended to keep it there until everyone else put theirs down.

The representatives from the monastery murmured among themselves. Even the goatish sheikh would have been preferable, but their hopes centered on the anonymous phone connection. They hovered breathlessly at every pause from the Barkeley's employee on the line to California. They had done what was necessary, but they dreaded the consequences. A Jew had not entered their calculations.

Abominably, satanically, wealthy, the shaggy, shabby mogul in the back row might buy it for vengeance, to fling the trauma of his tribe into the ocean, or, worse, take it back to the Holy Land to donate to some Jewish museum for display among that stubborn tribe that refused to acknowledge the Lord who sprang from their blood and gave his own blood to redeem the irredeemable. For all anyone knew, he might simply drop the priceless piece of wood that bore the stain of divinity into a pulping mix at one of his factories and truck it out on a spool the size of a sequoia trunk to be printed upon by one of the hundred papers he owned: tawdry headlines today, spread under birdcages tomorrow. The same newspaper that chronicled the sale of the cross might actually contain it, and no one would be the wiser.

It was an atrocity, an outrage. But it was too late to remove the item from auction. The brotherhood had signed a contract with Barkeley's. Once the minimum upset bid (confidentially, pricelessness was defined in the papers as $50,000) had been reached, the sale was to be considered final—unless they bid themselves, and paid Barkely's ten percent commission. That commission alone was now past their grandest expectations of the entirety.

•

Diderot. Rousseau. Even if the enrollment of the church remained steady, the ardor of its parishioners' passion diminished, and by the advent of the enlightened eighteenth cen-

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tury, the descendants of the pilgrims to Mont St. Scipelli were reluctant to make the difficult trip. Still the worst was yet to come. First there was Darwin and railroads, then Marx and psychology, each like a rabbit nibbling at the verifiability of doctrine, and then Hitler, and the bombing of the monastery by benevolent Yankee Flying Fortresses. The sedentary fortress had been used as an Axis command post in the latter days of World War II in a last-ditch effort to retain the Mediterranean and mount a southern naval offensive.

Now the time had come to heal the physical wounds of the war and the gradual deterioration of centuries. Roofing and repainting were dreadfully overdue. More importantly, if new acolytes were to be enticed to devote their lives to Scipelli's mission, it was vital to replumb the premises and purchase computers, perhaps replace the straw sack mattresses with Sealy Posturepedics since the days of mortification were history. Finally, after much painful deliberation, the sad time had come to send the monks' blessed glory and one clear asset off for auction.

•

What Barkeley's auctioneer in a silver-striped waistcoat did not know was that the seedier religious artifacts dealers on five continents were already well-acquainted with Mark since he had already purchased every other remnant of the cross that had come up for sale on the secondary market. Most of these relics were of clearly bogus provenance, but he didn't mind. His capital seemed endless, and though he was willing to haggle, he always, always, ended up with the merchandise. After all, what price was too great for something priceless? After acquiring a particular large section from a Palestinian terrorist, he sat with his French representative over celebratory arrack in an Alexandrian hotel bar. The thing itself sat between them.

One sip too many of the pungent liquid, and the dealer confessed his suspicions. Perhaps he was hoping to steer his well-heeled client in the direction of more prime merchandise, or perhaps he took unaccustomed pity on the victim.

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Mark just laughed. "It doesn't matter."

"But . . ."

Lifting up the object, Mark said, "Each of them has been the subject of faith, no? Perhaps it is the faith of the forger if no one else. But wouldn't Jesus say that the forger's—or sinner's—faith is more valuable than the saint's?"

"But . . ."

"Besides, who says the real thing was, well, real? Are you telling me that you believe?"

"Of course not."

"Good, then get them. Any of them, as many of them as you can. I want them all. I want IT." He idly plucked at the grime underneath his fingernail.

•

The woman in the green blouse was the first to turn around. Staring was contrary to auction-house etiquette, but her perusal was so frank that it transcended gawking. It was not merely curiosity, but a form of judgment.

•

And so, though he didn't know it, the Cypriot, among others, scoured the Mediterranean basin on Mark's behalf, but fewer and fewer of the pieces of the true cross were left. Mark had purchased everything available, and when they were officially unavailable for a reasonable or unreasonable sum, he employed yet another, more delicate agent to hire a contingent of trustworthy thugs to scale walls, crack safes and remove the sacred splinters, leaving carefully fabricated forgeries in their place. Sometimes he later purchased his own forgeries to avoid suspicion. In this way, Mark had acquired the entire continental horde of wood chips, ranging from modest to more brazen timbers. Only Mont St. Scipelli's was untouchable.

Since one fright (lightning, fire) in the fifteenth century, a cadre of monks dedicated themselves to sleeping on the flagstone floor beneath their treasure through eternity. The Sci-

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pelli fragment was therefore as continuously well-tended as Lenin's tomb. Mark pondered a guerilla assault upon the monastery, but that spiritual castle that Allied planes were compelled to bomb into submission could be breeched by no less a force. Disdaining the common morality, Mark knew that even he could not wage unilateral war against one of the pillars of the Church. He had to wait, and bide his time—until modernity compelled an outright sale. But until that day, this day, arrived, he had much to accomplish, and did so. He waved his fan, turning 750 into 800.

•

Once purchased or pilfered, the sections were shipped with extreme care, more care than insurance since loss was inconceivable, back to the Jew. Houses everywhere, at home no place, Mark chose the least of his dwellings to receive his wares. It was the one atop the Manhattan tower from the roof of which an antenna bounced the signals of the God Network into the heavens. Sitting on a white sofa in a white living room—he liked white; it dirtied so easily—he contemplated the glow of the city below, each corner an illuminated cross in the city of a million intersections.

One eye to his empire, he sat with his horde, some in elaborate frames, others in slim wax-paper envelopes, some under glass, some like the infamous Hermitage plank that had required the assistance of the remains of the KGB to liberate, leaned up against the wall like a carpenter's scraps. An enormous glass conference table sat in the middle of the room. Carefully Mark set his collection upon the glass.

•

The excitement in the room was palpable. The regulars had long since forgotten their disdain for the newcomers. They were united in their fascination with the process and their amazement at the result. Agape at the expenditure, which had not yet reached its limit, their eyes jerked back and forth

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from bidder to bidder to the Barkeley's employee holding up the eight-inch square rectangle that would be transferred after the bidding was over to one of those contending so fiercely for its acquisition.

Of course, from anywhere in the room but the auctioneer's pulpit, the splinter itself was invisible. Only its purple matte shone with the intensity of its contents. It was as if the furious bidding was for the frame alone, its substance an afterthought. Yet there, upon closer examination sat the tiny piece of wood that several human beings were willing, avid, delirious to exchange for a king's ransom, so the others in the room assumed it must be worth something. In short, they believed.

•

Twain was wrong; pieced together they would not make a clipper, a mere rowboat perhaps, or a four-pronged life raft on which to weather the harsh storms of this world's sea. They all sat on the long glass conference table along with the tools that had been delivered to the private suite at the top of the office tower as per the boss's instructions along with a crate of Elmer's yellow wood glue and another crate of epoxy wood filler.

For a moment, he felt like he had as a child in his family's Westchester basement, eyeing the rack of tools his father kept on a pegboard over the washing machine. Or perhaps the sensation was more akin to moments of struggle during the creation of his first *Journey* when he was attempting to place the words in proper alinement. Now, however, it was the greatest jigsaw of all time in front of him that would, he was confident, reveal a sum far greater than its constituent parts.

Humming tunelessly, the incongruous magnate in the grip of obsession painstakingly attached each to the other. He still didn't know why he was so consumed, but Mark had never especially questioned the path his life had taken; he merely set to the task, and did so now. Some pieces fit immaculately, clearly of a unit once upon a time, while other crude fragments had to be forced into blunt configuration with their peers.

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Mark overlayed one to the next, filling the gaps between two enormous rectangular arms with dabs of putty and filler.

Not a boat, but a cross, eighteen feet long, ten wide. Piece by piece came together over months of laborious trial and error, but in the back of Mark's mind he was always waiting for the centerpiece that would bind the two arms together forever. Now it was for sale

•

Unaccountably the bidding went over the house's expectations, despite its coy word *priceless.* Price was on everyone's mind at Barkeley's. 700 became 750, 800 became 850 until the auctioneer paused dramatically and said, "Do I hear one million?"

Mark waved his card with the same mild irritation as if he was swatting a fly.

The sheikh turned around in his seat and made a salaaming gesture of respect as he ceased his nodding.

The auctioneer turned to the telephone. The employee taking the call wiped sweat from his brow and said, "Two million."

Mark didn't pause to blink. He said, "Three."

The voice on the other end of the phone was apparently silent. The assistant hung up.

The men from the monastery cringed.

"Three million," the auctioneer cried, lifting his gavel. "Going once, going twice . . . . "

•

Who made the cross? In response, one might ask who was the best known carpenter in Jerusalem?

It was radical speculation, perhaps, but the answer Dr. J. Rittenour suggested in Barkeley's catalogue was expected to create a stir in religious/archaeological circles by asserting that the cross was the work of Joseph, and the famous final cry of the creature or creator—whatever he was—depending upon its beam was addressed not to a heavenly, but an earthly father.

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"Forgive them," he said, "for they know not what they do."

And then his head collapsed upon the internal beam of his breastbone.

•

"Four," the woman in the green blouse announced.

Every face in the room turned in her direction. For the first time Mark looked at the competition. She stood up and strode to the back of the room. "Every Christ needs his Judas," she said. "Or Judith. Here's my card." It read: Dr. J. Rittenour.

She left the room.

•

Junked at the site after the body was removed, the twin timbers lay askew, in a heap along with others that had carried less divine passengers. And how could one tell them apart? By the workmanship.

That night a barefoot child in a burlap garment snuck among the trash, searching for a coin or necklace or anything of any value that might be bartered for a scrap of food in the marketplace. He heard the wailing of the mourners at the edge of the hill, and saw the flickering candles of those who were preparing the body for the internment from which three days later . . . maybe.

Perhaps it took a child to make the leap into metaphor. Considering the pain of the believers, he suddenly understood that more valuable than gold, to them at least, might be the physical embodiment of the memory of their Lord and the anticipation of their salvation. He pried at the huge timbers and then leaped back in pain.

Tentatively, he approached the cross again, but the second he touched it, the fire in his hand flared. The boy could not see in the dusk, but he could feel the jagged edge of wood emerging from the ball of his thumb. He pinched the wood between the long, filthy nails of his other thumb and forefinger, extracted it, and fled.

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Pandemonium exploded in Barkeley's as the echo of the auctioneer's gavel faded. Junior employees hurried to their positions to conclude the afternoon's business and stringers from newspapers rushed to phone in the unexpected story. The regulars huddled in stunned acknowledgement of the financial clout of faith while dealers jabbered amongst themselves and the brothers from Scipelli sank back in their padded seats, relieved yet as uneasy as their hosts had been at the start of the auction. They felt as if they had witnessed a miracle, and it did not feel good.

•

The boy carried his prize to a small encampment south of Jerusalem, hard by the Dead Sea, as Julian would carry it forward a millennium in the future. There he traded it to the tribe for a melon and the believers tossed the holy item into a clay jug with some ancient—even then they were ancient—manuscripts and attempted to live the life their master had decreed.

•

Mark sat at home and looked at the card. He still sought the unlimited now that even the sky was ablink with his satellite. The only terrain left to conquer was the ineffable, the ethereal, the other, something beyond the atmosphere, something celestial. For a second he almost laughed to realize that he felt the same cravings that his inane books apparently satisfied across the globe.

He knew that she had bought the piece of cross for either of two reasons: to keep it, or to sell it to him. Barkeley's would take its commission on the four million, not bad for ten minutes work, but the auction house was heretofore eliminated from any further transaction. Had the both of them remained in the room bidding against each other they might

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have gone to five, six, seven million, who could tell? If he was willing to pay one more penny than she was he would still have it, not in the auction room, but elsewhere.

•

The keepers of the splinter by the inland body of salt water eventually died, but not before they told their children about their legacy. Those children in turn told theirs, who told the Turks who slaughtered them as Julian would slaughter their Turkish descendants ages into the future.

And all of their bones bleached in the sun and crumbed to desert dust.

•

Midnight, contemplating his loss, the doorbell rang and Mark knew who it was. A person whose eight-figure check was good at Barkeley's had the wherewithal to detect his secret address. He dismissed his servants and buzzed in the woman with the green shirt.

"Call me Judy," Dr. Rittenour said. She didn't look like a woman with four million dollars to spend, but, then again, neither did Mark appear to be such a man.

"Wine?" he asked with the sophistication that came naturally with vast wealth, and ushered his guest onto the terrace where the huge structure had been hoisted into a vertical position and secured with thin wires by the baffled, well-tipped superintendents of the tower. Side by side with the metal broadcast antenna, it was almost modest, but Mark flicked a switch which sent beams from three concealed spotlights and turned the cross into an illuminated vision. In the center of the vision, there was a gap, half an inch long, an eighth of an inch wide.

"Just as I expected," Dr. Rittenour said.

For the first time, Mark examined his competition—or was she his confederate? She was easily fifty, but her spiritual inquiries had kept her vigorous and she was clearly aware of

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how attractive she was. Her skin glowed in the reflection. The silk fluttered against her chest, her breasts unconstrained by any variety of elastic cross.

"Really?"

"It was obvious. Last November, the piece of the Omphalos cross was sold to a mysterious, unidentified party, and in April the piece of the Santa Hermina cross was removed from its crypt by undiscovered culprits, as was the Hermitage piece. Yes, I've been watching the gradual disappearance of the pieces of the cross for years. For one with an eye to the sacred, it was clear that they were headed for the same destination. The only piece that was left was Mont St. Scipelli's. That was the key. Wherever it was bound, the rest were to be found, and I rather assumed that they would now be in one piece."

"Elementary, Watson."

"Of course the thing that is truly curious is that although one might hazard an educated guess as to the what of the matter," and she gestured to the giant cross with admiration, "one still wonders about the why."

"I've asked myself that."

"And how have you answered yourself?" She swirled the dregs of wine around the glass and reclined on the terrace's redwood chaise lounge, placing one ankle over the other, toeing a leather sandal to the floor.

"I . . ." He was nervous. "I don't know." Met with silence, he repeated himself. "I just don't know. I suppose there's an emptiness that I'd like filled."

Dr. Rittenour extended one arm to the left.

He was at a loss to echo the moronic language of his books. "It's a need for something greater than myself."

She extended the other arm to the right and remained silent.

"I . . . I never got that at home."

Her voice lower by an octave, the professor purred. "Come to Momma."

•

Words, words, in the beginning were words . . . ecstasy on the page.

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From his secret adolescent readings of the sci-fi porn comix that satisfied his imagination as the cheerleaders of White Plains High failed to satisfy his body, Mark had found something cosmically, karmically, he might have said, vital in the notion of words making worlds on paper. Creating something from nothing. Yet even before the disastrous day his vice came to light he had the sense, so clear yet so far from verbalization, that there *was* a prior truth.

Then came the day when his mother discovered his cache, ineffectively hidden under his Sealy Posturepedic mattress. She showed the offending texts to his father, and the man who would later vow to never buy another book turned brick red at the sight of such language. "Filth," the dry cleaner cried when his son returned from school proudly holding forth a sign he had made in wood shop.

It was a rectangle of knotty pine, eight inches wide, eighteen long, notched at the perimeter, bearing upon its unevenly stained surface the chiseled out word *The* followed by the family's surname with an elegant if ungrammatical apostrophe before the pluralizing *s*, and it was set upon a pointed stake.

"They're just. . . . books," he stammered.

The explanation was so insufficient and Mark's father's rage so great. The man's chest expanded barely short of exploding like the primordial Big Bang. Finally, however, as sadly incapable of giving voice to his passion as his own offending offspring, he simply thrust out his arms, and shoved Mark.

Boy and sign toppled backwards, but the sign fell first, and the boy fell upon the sign, the stake of which pierced his temple as it was intended to pierce the quarter acre greensward in front of the suburban ranch.

Mark's mother, absolute cause of his birth, proximate cause of his pain, shrieked and bundled the bleeding child into the family station wagon. She drove at warp speed to the local emergency room, where a sleep-deprived intern stitched him up and left a novice's pucker in the side of his head.

•

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Mark knew what Dr. Rittenour—Judith—meant; that he knew, that he needed. He was sick of answering other people's questions and satisfying other people's spiritual cravings. He wanted his own answers, and if God couldn't give him that perhaps this one of his creatures might.

No further overtures were required. He unbuttoned his shirt, unbuckled his belt, kicked off his shoes. Wearing only briefs, he curled into her arms, surprised for a moment that they were not nailed to a ledge of wood and were capable of embracing him. "Forgive my father," he said, "for he doesn't know what he does."

"Forget him," she murmured, as she reached into her bag and grasped the tiny expensive item between her fingers.

•

He forgot where he was until he felt a pinprick on the temple, most vulnerable point of the body, beside his left eye, in the spot marked by the small indentation from his childhood, the incompetent surgical pucker half an inch long, an eighth of an inch wide.

A second later, the pucker was filled, the searcher's life and vision simultaneously complete. But for that one second, he saw the blinding illumination he had sought for as long as he could remember. The light of eternity flashed, the bite of eternity drew blood, and both of his eyes rolled into his head, and he rolled off the professor, dead as God.

•

Dr. Rittenour sat upright and replaced her shoes. Then she opened the large pocketbook she carried everywhere. She extracted an axe.

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NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

FICTION

Melvin Jules Bukiet's most recent books are *While the Messiah Tarries*, *After* and the forthcoming *Signs and Wonders*. He teaches at Sarah Lawrence College.

Sheila Kohler is the author of *The Perfect Place*, *Miracles in America* and *The House on R Street*. Her story in this issue is excerpted from a work in progress. She is an instructor at the New School for Social Research in New York City.

Kristina McGrath's first novel is *House Work*. She is the recipient of a Pushcart Prize for Fiction and a Kenyon Review Award for Literary Excellence in Fiction. In addition to teaching at the University of Louisville in Kentucky, she serves as an advisory editor for *The American Voice*.

Steven Millhauser's most recent novel is *Martin Dressler: The Tale of an American Dreamer*, for which he received the Pulitzer Prize in 1997. A collection of stories, *The Knife Thrower*, will appear next year.

Mark Richard is the author of the novel *Fishboy* and the short-story collection *The Ice at the Bottom of the World*. A new collection of stories, *Charity*, will be published in the fall.

POETRY

Craig Arnold was the Amy Lowell Poetry Travelling Scholar for 1996–1997. His poems have appeared in *The New Republic* and *The Yale Review*, and are forthcoming in *Poetry*.

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Mark Bibbins has published poetry in *The Antioch Review* and *Western Humanities Review.* He is the assistant editor of the *Best American Poetry* series and lives in New York City.

Billy Collins's books of poetry include *The Art of Drowning*, published in 1995, and the forthcoming *Picnic, Lightning.* He lives in Somers, New York.

John Drury is the author, most recently, of *The Poetry Dictionary.* He teaches at the University of Cincinnati.

Daisy Friedman's work has appeared in *Bomb*, *Confrontation* and *Mudfish.*

Andrew Gilligan is currently enrolled as a graduate student at the University of Iowa. This is his first publication.

Beth Gylys is an assistant professor of English at Mercyhurst College in Erie, Pennsylvania.

Rachel Hadas's many books of poetry include *The Empty Bed* and translations from Latin, French and Modern Greek. A 1994 Ingram Merrill Award recipient, she lives in New York City.

Edward Hirsch's new collection of poems, *On Love*, will be published this summer.

Martha Hollander's book *The Game of Statues* won the 1989 Walt Whitman Award from the Academy of American Poets. She teaches history of art at Hofstra University and resides in Forest Hills, New York.

Elizabeth Macklin is the author of *A Woman Kneeling in the Big City*, a collection of poetry. In 1994, she was a Guggenheim Fellow in Poetry.

Linda Pastan has published ten books of poetry, including the forthcoming *Carnival Evening: New and Selected Poems 1968–1998.* She was Poet Laureate of Maryland from 1991–1995.

Kenneth Rosen's most recent book of poetry is *No Snake, No Paradise.* In spring 1997, he was the Balkan Scholar at the American University in Bulgaria. He teaches English at the University of Southern Maine.

P. Shneidre's English versions of the Bengali poems of Swami Vivekananda were published last year in a collection entitled *All of Love.* His work appears most frequently in *Exquisite Corpse.* He lives in Hollywood, California.

Grace Schulman is the author of several collections of poetry, including *For That Day Only*, *Hemispheres* and *Burn Down the Icons.* She is the poetry editor of *The Nation.*

Vijay Seshadri received the 1995 Bernard F. Conners Prize for Poetry from *The Paris Review.* He is the author of *Wild Kingdom.*

Jordan Smith's most recent book is *The Household of Continuance.* He teaches at Union College in Schenectady, New York.

Terry Stokes's most recently published collection of poetry is *Sportin' News.* He teaches in the English department of the University of Cincinnati.

Richard Tillinghast's *Today in the Café Trieste*, a collection of new and selected poems, was published in Ireland in 1997 and is distributed in this country by Dufour.

Sidney Wade is the author of *Empty Sleeves* and the forthcoming *Green.* She teaches at the University of Florida.

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INTERVIEWS

Audrey Bilger (Jeanette Winterson interview) is an assistant professor of literature at Claremont McKenna College. Her critical study *Laughing Feminism: Subversive Comedy in Frances Burney, Maria Edgeworth, and Jane Austen* is forthcoming in October 1998.
Ken Jordan (Barney Rosset interview) is the Director of New Media Development for an advertising company in New York.

ART

Wendy Mark has collaborated with poets Charles Simic and David St. John, on *Wendy's Pinball* and *The Figure U*, respectively. She lives in New York City.
Shirin Neshat lives in New York City, where she is represented by the Annina Nosei Gallery.
Fred Tomaselli is represented by the Jack Tilton Gallery.

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